ST
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These are their offices

Digital nomads who live and work anywhere in the world C4



TRAVEL
Lee Siew Hua goes glamping in Yunnan
C8&9



CNY snacks worth the calories
C14&15

5 unique yusheng dishes
C17

INSIGHT
Looking beyond Raffles



• WARREN FERNANDEZ
Colonial past – no need to glorify it, no need to reject it
• Unearthing Singapore's history
• 200 years in 20 objects
B3-8

OLIVIA HO
I am the anti-Marie Kondo
B9



DENISE CHONG
Let go of stuff like you're about to be let go
C6



TENNIS
Osaka is first Asian No. 1
A32



1 ½-hour power outage hits parts of Singapore A2 | CPF payout age: What you need to know B16

Initiatives for terror awareness to be scaled up

Our preparedness and response must be in-built and part of the new normal, says Shanmugam

Joanna Seow

Recognising that Singaporeans have to be not just aware of the terror threat, but also committed to taking action and responsibility, the Government is upscaling its anti-terror outreach efforts.

A new SGSecure Responders Network will also be formed so that members of the public trained in emergency skills can volunteer to be committed to be mobilised during a crisis.

In addition to expanding SGSecure roadshows, including holding them at malls to reach a more diverse group, there will also be a bigger focus on involving residents in private estates with a Safety and Security Day at condominiums to practise evacuation drills, basic fire safety and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

At an SGSecure event yesterday at Our Tampines Hub, Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam highlighted how in the years since SGSecure – the national terrorism awareness movement – was launched in 2016, three in four Singaporeans are now aware of it.

But more needs to be done, given that the terror threat has not gone away.

"While the attraction of ISIS has abated, nevertheless, the likelihood of somebody, or a group of people, getting angry, getting radicalised, self-radicalised, or radicalised through preachers – those threats remain. They are the new normal," said Mr Shanmugam.

"So our preparedness and response, I think, have to be in-built and part of the new normal. This means getting people committed, not just to be aware, but committed to take action themselves."

Pointing to the new SGSecure tagline, "Our Response Matters. We make SGSecure", he asked the 600 participants at the event: "How are you going to respond? It involves individual responsibility, group responsibility. How do you take ownership?"

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs Sun Xueling, who outlined the plans for the third year of SGSecure at yesterday's event, added: "We must build on the strong foundations we have achieved together to make SGSecure. Together, we can create a generation of ready responders, a community of selfless lifesavers and a nation of everyday heroes."

The new plans include leaders from the grassroots, the community, religious organisations, businesses and schools in five constituencies taking part in Community Response Round Tables to collaborate on emergency preparations in a pilot project.

The myResponder mobile platform, which alerts Singaporeans to people nearby who need medical assistance or help to put out small fires, will also be integrated into the SGSecure app so that more people can access it to offer help.

A new series of SGSecure roadshows will also be held in 16 suburban malls and other places with high human traffic over two years, starting from the latter half of this year.

Ms Sun highlighted Singaporeans who responded to alerts for help on the myResponder app. Grassroots volunteer Adelina Akil is an example of someone who took the initiative to learn CPR and the use of an automated external defibrillator. She helped to revive a woman who collapsed at Jurong Point shopping centre in 2017.

"They are everyday Singaporeans," said Ms Sun.

"They do not jump out of buildings or helicopters or wield machine guns. But like the heroes you see in blockbuster action movies, they save lives."

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Gone too soon

They came in the thousands to pay their final respects to Aloysius Pang who died last Wednesday while serving as an NSman in New Zealand. Among them were grieving fans, celebrity co-workers and public figures. Even strangers unfamiliar with his acting career stood in the queue. A6&7



"I've worked with Aloysius on only one show but I could see that he was such a polite, humble and hardworking young man."
Actress Zoe Tay



No wall win, but Trump agrees to reopen govt

US President Donald Trump, who vowed to negotiate big deals in the White House, came out of a government shutdown battle on Friday politically wounded.

With Americans exasperated over the 35-day shutdown's impact on everyday life, including air travel, Mr Trump finally gave in and agreed to reopen the government until Feb 15, without getting the US$5.7 billion (S$7.7 billion) he had demanded for a border wall.

Behind the scenes at the White House, there was a recognition that he had lost this round. "Perhaps he lost the short-term battle," one senior administration official was cited by Reuters as saying.

A key factor for Mr Trump, the official said, was the stories of law enforcement officials unable to do their jobs due to the shutdown.

Mr Trump's job approval ratings dropped from an already anaemic 40 per cent into the mid-30s – a troubling sign as he looks ahead to a 2020 re-election battle, already clouded by the prospect of more headlines from a Russian election meddling probe. That was driven home on Friday by the arrest of his long-time friend Roger Stone in an FBI dawn raid in Florida.

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Confidential papers in trash a gold mine for data thieves

Unshredded documents with sensitive info discarded with little care by firms in CBD area

Calvin Yang

Documents containing valuable information are ending up in the trash, unshredded, and making for easy pickings for unauthorised people.

In the narrow alleys of the Central Business District (CBD) and along the Singapore River promenade, garbage bags and boxes stuffed with such papers can be found almost every day.

The papers include unwanted documents from banks, law firms and quantity surveyors, containing information such as clients' identity card numbers, loan application statuses and divorce case details.

Entire cartons of unshredded documents can also be bought from karung guni collectors in the area, and for just a few dollars, checks by The Sunday Times have found.

The practice raises questions of whether businesses here are too lax about proper disposal of documents, even as laws on the use and protection of personal data have been tightened in recent years.

Firms are shoring up their defences against cyber attacks and digital data theft, but how they handle hard-copy documents has not received as much attention, said observers.

Mr Jenson Tan, general manager at information security firm Shred-it Singapore, said: "This makes it easy for data thieves to simply retrieve the discarded items for their use. You can easily see boxes of paper documents being discarded in open bins in the CBD. If you look closely, these documents usually contain sensitive data, such as full names, residential addresses, or scanned copies of NRICs and passports."

Over the past month, boxes with such documents were spotted by The Sunday Times around Bonham Street, Market Street and Amoy Street. Cleaners from nearby office buildings would unload them from trolleys for recycling firms to pick up later in the day.

On one occasion, two paper cartons filled with documents were left unattended outside a building in Bonham Street before a recycling firm picked them up. The papers included internal reports, profit and loss statements, and loan applications of at least $10 million.

In some cases, office cleaners sell them directly to the karung guni man, who will go on to resell them.

For just $20, The Sunday Times bought 40kg worth of documents from two karung guni men.

They included confidential e-mail exchanges, divorce suit details, and construction drawings for new developments.

One seven-page document even detailed a trading firm's fund movement in November last year.

Such lapses are not new. In 2016, a trash bag filled with United Overseas Bank documents was found behind the bank's headquarters in Raffles Place. The trash bag contained corporate statements, loan applications and internal reports.

The authorities launched an investigation but it is unclear what happened in the end. The Monetary Authority of Singapore did not reply to queries by press time.

Organisations that fail to protect consumers' personal data can be fined up to $1 million under the Personal Data Protection Act, which took full effect in July 2014. The Personal Data Protection Commission has fined at least 40 organisations over the past three years, based on the cases listed on its website.

Today, some companies still leave their unwanted documents to office cleaners to sort, said Mr Tan.

They are often not destroyed, as white, unshredded paper can command a higher price when sold to recycling firms, he added.

Shredded paper has weaker fibres, resulting in lower-quality products such as paper towels and egg cartons. But the data in these documents is far more valuable, said those interviewed. In the wrong hands, they can be sold and used for illegal activities, including money laundering and identity theft.

With just a name and identity card number, it is also possible to find one's home address within a few hours, said private investigator James Loh, managing director of International Investigators.

While there are businesses that play fast and loose with confidential documents, more firms are slowly taking steps to secure their data – aware that their reputation could take a hit if clients' data is leaked.

In the past year alone, waste management firms have seen a jump of between 20 per cent and 40 per cent in the number of clients who engage them to dispose confidential documents. They include banks, charities and hospitals.

One such company is Right Hook Communications, which has used a disposal service for the past three years. Ms Debbie Pereira, senior account manager at the public relations agency, said: "It gives us better peace of mind. We do not have to worry about who the documents are going to end up with."

She added that the penalties for violating general data protection provisions are not worth the risk.

She said: "As a small company, any fine, large or small, will cause great impact to the company's finances, and is detrimental to the sustainability of the business."

Mr Andrew Tay, business development manager at Tay Paper Recycling, said: "Companies are becoming more cautious. They'd rather spend the money to properly dispose sensitive documents."

These documents are either shredded on-site by these firms or transported to factories, where large machines slice them up into thin shreds of paper and mix them up, so that it is harder to put them back together.

Disposal firms then issue a certificate of destruction to confirm the documents have been destroyed, said Mr Colin Loy, managing director of BulkyWaste Removal.

For employees, it is important to practise good data protection habits, such as keeping confidential documents under lock and key, and shredding unwanted ones, said Mr Wilson Lee, customer service executive at Skap Waste Management.

Said Mr Tay: "It may be troublesome, but it is necessary. Once a company's reputation is tarnished, it is harder to build it up again."

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Two cartons filled with documents left unattended outside a building in Bonham Street for disposal. The practice raises questions of whether businesses here are too lax about proper disposal of documents. ST PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG



The cartons discarded in Bonham Street contained internal bank reports, profit and loss statements, and loan applications of at least $10 million.

TREASURE TROVE

This makes it easy for data thieves to simply retrieve the discarded items for their use. You can easily see boxes of paper documents being discarded in open bins in the CBD. If you look closely, these documents usually contain sensitive data, such as full names, residential addresses, or scanned copies of NRICs and passports.

MR JENSON TAN, general manager at information security firm Shred-it Singapore.

1 1/2-hour power outage hits parts of Singapore

Goh Yan Han

Some areas of Singapore were hit by a power outage, lasting about 1 1/2 hours, yesterday afternoon.

Residents in Bishan, Toa Payoh and Shunfu reported losing power in their homes. Lifts and traffic lights were also affected.

An update on electricity provider SP Group's Facebook page said that supply was fully restored at 2.58pm. The disruption affected parts of Ang Mo Kio, Bishan, Sin Ming and Thomson, and SP Group said supply was progressively restored from 1.46pm, 16 minutes after the outage struck.

SP Group said a preliminary investigation found that the incident was related to a fire at a substation in Bright Hill Road.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) said that it was alerted to the fire in Bright Hill Road at about 1.30pm.

It added that an equipment-related fire at the site was extinguished and a firefighter was taken to Singapore General Hospital for smoke inhalation.

The Sunday Times understands that the fire was extinguished in under 10 minutes.

A spokesman for the Energy Market Authority (EMA) said the energy regulator took a serious view of electricity supply disruptions.

The spokesman added that EMA will work with the energy industry to take appropriate measures, so as to minimise the risk of such a disruption from occurring again.

EMA, SP Group and SCDF are investigating the incident.

Speaking in Mandarin, Shunfu resident Jane Oh told The Sunday Times that she was buying eggs at a provision shop at her block when the blackout happened.

She also said that staff from the town council came by at around 2pm to check on the situation and to make sure that no one was trapped inside lifts.

"I started hearing the emergency alarm being rung in the lift, and realised that people were trapped inside, and the blackout had affected at least the whole block."

An elderly couple, who were leaving after visiting their daughter on the 10th storey, were trapped in the lift, said Ms Oh, 56, a freelance teacher. "The lift had already reached the first floor, then the power was cut, trapping them inside. When the lift started working again at around 2pm, the woman told us that she didn't want to take the lift any more and told us not to take it too," she added.

"But I live on the 13th storey and don't have enough energy to climb so many stairs.

"Another resident was also sitting at the void deck, with many bags of groceries, waiting for lift services to be restored," said Ms Oh. She added that this was her first time experiencing a power outage in more than 20 years of living in Shunfu.

Toa Payoh resident Mohamad Syahid Arif, 38, was getting ready to head out from his second-floor home at Block 97 in Lorong 3 when the outage occurred.

"There was totally no power. The lift was also not working. I could hear that there was someone stuck in the lift, pressing the emergency button," said Mr Syahid, who works on a freelance basis.

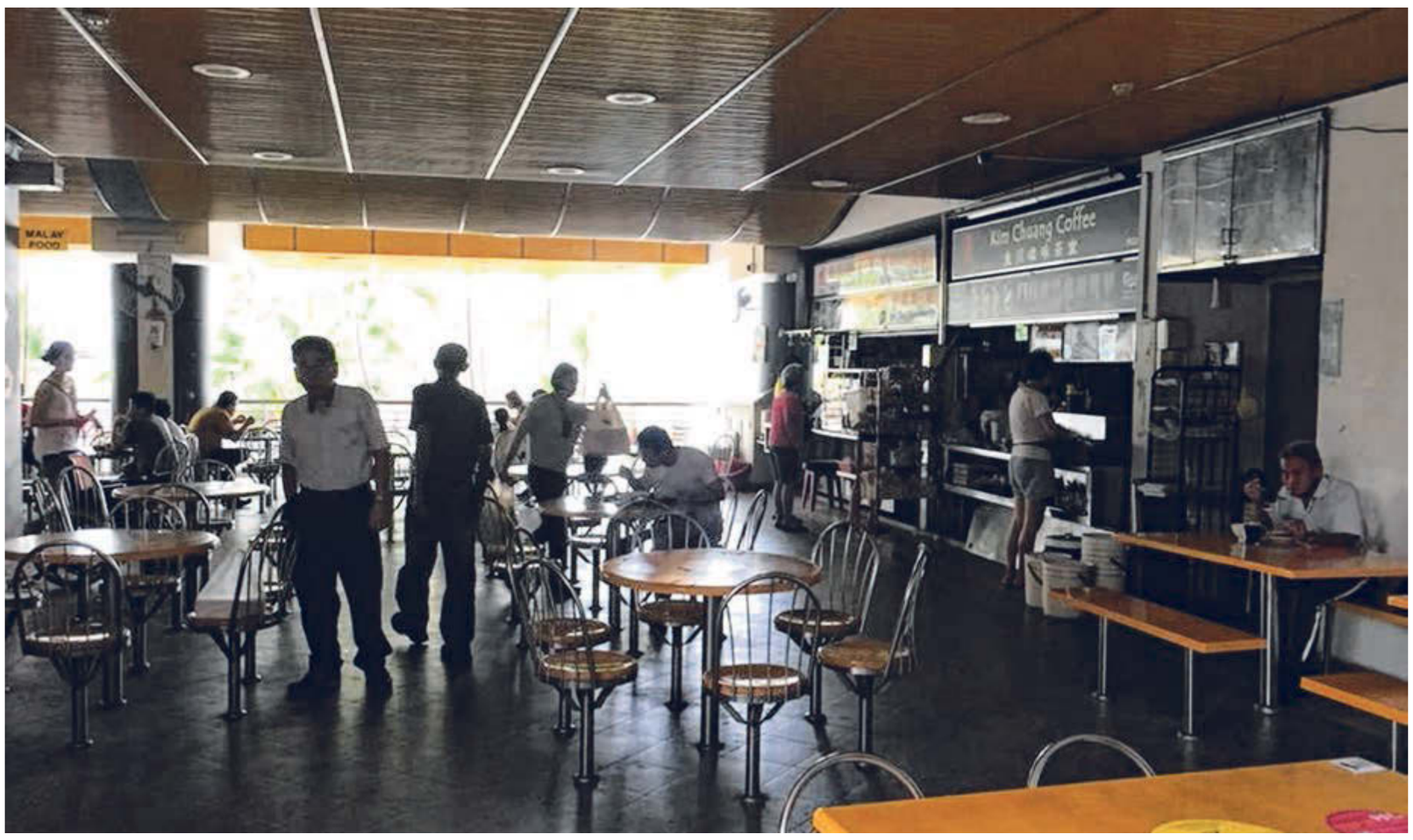
He also said that while he could not contact Bishan-Toa Payoh Town Council through its emergency hotline, it responded to a message on Facebook.

He said: "It was quite calm, and there wasn't much chaos." In his case, the supply disruption was brief, lasting for about 25 minutes.

Around 4.30pm, a spokesman for the town council said that no one was injured during the outage, and that electricity supply had resumed across the constituency.

The spokesman also described the situation as "calm and managed".

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Shunfu Market was among places hit by yesterday's power outage. The disruption affected parts of Ang Mo Kio, Bishan, Sin Ming and Thomson. Electricity provider SP Group said power supply was fully restored at 2.58pm. PHOTO: ST READER

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President Donald Trump walking away after speaking about a temporary reopening of the US government in the Rose Garden of the White House on Friday. As the 35-day shutdown wore on, polls showed that more Americans blamed him for the shutdown than they did the Democrats and Speaker Nancy Pelosi. PHOTO: WASHINGTON POST

Democrats claim victory after Trump agrees to end shutdown

US President in deal to reopen government for three weeks while negotiating funding for wall

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent

President Donald Trump temporarily backed down on Friday from a five-week stand-off with the Democrats, ending America's longest partial government shutdown without getting the funds he demanded for his border wall.

The concession left him politically weakened, with little to show for it on a day his former associate Roger Stone was also charged with witness tampering and other crimes.

Blowback was swift. Democrats claimed victory and hardline conservative commentators decried the abrupt end as a capitulation, pointing out that the short-term deal, which will last until Feb 15, was reached in spite of Mr Trump's previous insistence that he would not sign any deal that did not include funding for a US$5.7 billion (S$7.7 billion) wall at the US-Mexico border.

The President on his part claimed he had got the Democrats to agree that "barriers, fencing, or walls – or whatever you want to call it – will be an important part of the solution", as he announced he would sign a Bill to reopen the government for three weeks while negotiating border wall funding.

He hinted that he might declare a national emergency to bypass Congress for wall funding or let the government shut down again, should negotiations fail once more.

"We really have no choice but to build a powerful wall or steel barrier. If we don't get a fair deal from Congress, the government will either shut down on Feb 15 again, or I will use the powers afforded to me under the laws and the Constitution of the United States to address this emergency," he said at the White House Rose Garden.

The 35-day shutdown had been bruising for the 800,000 federal employees who were put on leave or made to work without pay since Dec 22, and for Mr Trump, who had once promised to own the shutdown.

As it wore on, polls showed that more Americans blamed him for the shutdown than they did the Democrats and Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The economy and national infrastructure that relied on federal employees also came under increasing strain. Hours before Mr Trump ended the shutdown, airports on the East Coast buckled, delaying or halting flights because of a shortage of air traffic controllers, who called in sick rather than be forced to work without pay.

Thursday's failure of two Bills in the Democrat-controlled House and Republican-majority Senate, one with wall funding and the other without, underscored the increasing precariousness of Mr Trump's position as six members of his party broke ranks to vote to reopen the government without the funding.

Frustrated Republican senators also lashed out at Vice-President Mike Pence and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell during a closed-door lunch before the vote on Thursday. Faced with an internal revolt, Mr McConnell telephoned Mr Trump to tell him that the shutdown could not hold, reported the Washington Post.

Senate Democrat minority leader Chuck Schumer told a press conference the agreement ultimately endorsed his party's position. Criticising the White House, he said: "Shutting down the government over a policy difference is self-defeating. It accomplishes nothing but pain and suffering for the country, and incurs an enormous political cost to the party shutting it down."

But Mr Trump insisted on Friday night that he had not caved in, writing on Twitter: "This was in no way a concession. It was taking care of millions of people who were getting badly hurt by the Shutdown with the understanding that in 21 days, if no deal is done, it's off to the races!"

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Travellers waiting at LaGuardia Airport. Hundreds of flights were grounded or delayed on Friday as air traffic controllers called in sick. PHOTO: REUTERS



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi arriving at the Capitol Building on Friday to sign a deal to end the partial government shutdown. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Why the Trump administration caved in

1 AVIATION DISRUPTION
Some air traffic controllers and screening officers who had been working without pay since the start of the shutdown did not report for duty, triggering significant flight delays across north-eastern United States on Friday. Wider concerns about travel were also affecting bookings.

2 TAX FILING CHAOS
The shutdown caused a backlog of millions of documents and unanswered calls ahead of the US tax filing season which starts tomorrow.

The Trump administration may have ordered 46,000 Internal Revenue Service employees back to work, without pay, earlier this month, but not everyone complied.

A New York Times report on Friday said less than half of those recalled to process tax refunds and take calls showed up for work.

As a result, five million written correspondences had gone unanswered and only 18 per cent of calls had reached a representative, the report added.

3 WASHINGTON IN PAIN
In the Washington area, an estimated one in six workers had been affected.

The shutdown was also affecting economic growth in a region that grew 2.1 per cent in 2017, more than the 1.1 per cent growth it saw in 2016.

4 LACK OF ECONOMIC DATA
The impasse halted the release and publication of necessary economic indicators and statistics including wholesale inventories, trade balance and new home sales.

These could have an impact on markets and how the Federal Reserve will move interest rates.

5 KNOCK-ON EFFECT
No permits, no approvals, no listings on the stock exchange. Businesses were in limbo. Contractors that supply services to affected agencies were also losing money.

The federal court system warned it would exhaust funding this month. Food subsidies for low-income families were expected to run out by next month.

An analysis by ratings agency Standard & Poor's indicated that the US economy lost at least US$6 billion (S$8.12 billion) in the five weeks the government was partly shuttered – more than the US$5.7 billion Mr Trump had requested for the wall.

Rebecca Lynne Tan

News analysis

Trump's inner circle unscathed despite confidant's indictment



Nirmal Ghosh
US Bureau Chief
In Washington

Hours after a pre-dawn FBI raid on his Florida home, with armed agents arriving silently and surrounding his house, then one banging on his front door, Roger Stone, 66, was in court on Friday in handcuffs and shackles.

But minutes later, he was out on bail. The man who has been called the "dark prince" of American politics – credited with engineering not only Mr Al Gore's defeat in the notorious 2000 Florida recount, but also the rise to power of President Donald Trump – left the court spreading his arms and flashing victory signs, proclaiming to waiting journalists his loyalty to Mr Trump.

Stone was indicted on seven counts including obstruction, witness tampering and making false statements in connection with the Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The indictment also alleges that an unnamed "senior Trump campaign official was directed to contact Stone about any additional releases and what other damaging information" WikiLeaks – which had hacked into the Democratic Party campaign and stolen e-mails – had regarding the "Clinton Campaign."

On the face of it, the probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller – focused on Russia's interference in the 2016 election, but which Mr Trump insists is a witch-hunt intent on bringing him down from the presidency – seems to be closing in on Mr Trump's inner circle.

But that would be a premature conclusion. Stone is the sixth former Trump associate charged by the Special Counsel.

The drama aside, the indictment does not however charge him with anything amounting to collusion by then-candidate Trump.

"The President is safe here," his lawyer Rudy Giuliani told the Washington Post.

Stone said he was not guilty and would be vindicated.

But the Wikileaks connection has sparked speculation. The prosecution could lead in different directions, including more indictments, analysts say.

The fact that Stone is a political showman clouds the picture. His first words to the media when he left the courtroom on Friday, after posting US$250,000 (S$339,000) bail and being put on travel restrictions, were his oft-repeated Oscar Wilde mantra: "The only thing worse than being talked about, is not being talked about."

Dr Glenn Altschuler, professor of American Studies at Cornell University told The Sunday Times: "Roger Stone is a person who has been able to convince people that he knows more than he knows, for decades ... He traffics in insider knowledge, in dirty tricks, in schemes, and he has done so as a self-promoter since the days of Richard Nixon.

"And so we don't know whether his lies were in service of bolstering his reputation as a man in the know, or whether his lies – and it is very clear that he has lied – are in the service of covering up actions in coordination with, or with the knowledge of, individuals in the Trump campaign."

After news of the arrest broke, Mr Trump's press secretary Sarah Sanders told CNN: "This has nothing to do with the President and certainly nothing to do with the White House. This is something that has to do solely with that individual, not something that affects us in this building."

And Stone quickly appeared, as always impeccably dressed, on both Fox News and CNN on Friday night, where he claimed the indictment was "fabricated" and insisted he would not "bear false witness" against the President.

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No free mediation for divorcing couples worth $2 million

Resources to focus on less well-off and disputes involving children, but move draws some flak

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs Correspondent

Wealthier divorcing couples fighting over money are being directed to private mediation services, as the Family Justice Courts (FJC) look to concentrate their free mediation resources on less well-off couples and those in disputes involving children.

Until Dec 31 last year, divorcing couples with assets of a gross value of under $3 million were able to seek free mediation at the FJC. Those above this threshold were directed to the Singapore Mediation Centre (SMC) for private mediation, which costs each party $3,000 a day.

However, as of Jan 1, that threshold has been lowered to $2 million – meaning couples with $2 million or more have to pay to iron out their disputes. Only disputes over the division of assets are sent for private mediation, not those involving issues over children such as access and custody.

Assets include the matrimonial home and other assets acquired by one or both parties during the marriage, lawyers said.

A spokesman for the FJC told The Sunday Times: "Directing cases in which parties are only disputing the financial aspects of their case for private mediation allows the Family Dispute Resolution Division (within the FJC) to better utilise its resources to focus on cases involving children.

"As mediation is provided free of charge at the FJC, private mediation for cases meeting or exceeding the assets threshold allows our mediation resources to be made available to the most appropriate and needy of family cases."

Lawyers interviewed had mixed feelings about the move.

Ms Sharanjit Kaur of Withers KhattarWong described it as a good move as it will free up more mediation slots at the FJC for divorcing couples who cannot agree on their children's matters.

Mr Ashok Chugani of Mirchandani and Partners noted that most couples' main asset is their HDB flat and most would have assets of less than $2 million, adding: "For the ordinary person, $2 million is a lot of money."

Lawyer Shone Aye Cheng of AC Shone & Co noted that many couples are asset rich but cash poor, and may be hard-pressed to fork out more cash for private mediation.

She added that each party must also pay for his own lawyer to be present at the private mediation session on top of the SMC's fees, while legal costs can increase further if a dispute is not resolved during mediation and ends up being fought in court.

During mediation, an independent third party helps the couple to seek an amicable resolution on their division of assets. The advantages of mediation include potentially saving on hefty legal fees and reducing the acrimony involved in a litigation process.

Since the private mediation scheme was launched in October 2016, a total of 88 cases have been referred to the SMC.

One couple owned a business together and had assets of about $15 million. They came to a compromise regarding the division of their business assets as the mediation helped them to understand what is considered a fair division from each other's perspective.

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It takes a constituency to raise a child: Sam Tan

Joanna Seow

Many of the pieces are already in place within communities to tackle long-term absenteeism among students, but better coordination and volunteers to reach families are needed, Second Minister for Education Indranee Rajah said yesterday.

Specialised agencies like the Social Service Office or family service centres can provide financial assistance or counselling, and teachers can follow up in school, but there also needs to be people who can meet the families.

"Some of the more intensive specialised parts would fall within the remit of the agencies or the ministry or the school, but there is very clearly a role for volunteers," Ms Indranee said. "And then, once volunteers come into the picture, there will be the question of the coordination of the volunteers and the selection of the volunteers."

She made the points after joining discussions at a public engagement session organised by Uplift (Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce).

Ms Indranee, who chairs the task force, told reporters after the event that some of the solutions suggested were the befriending and mentoring of families.

This could involve volunteers accompanying younger children to school if their parents were unable to, or helping to motivate older children to go to school.

She said the task force will look at how to implement a good framework for referral of cases, as well as for the coordination of assistance and volunteers.

About 80 people including school principals, youth leaders and voluntary welfare organisation representatives participated in the session at the Ministry of Education in Buona Vista to discuss community strategies that could be implemented alongside school efforts.



Second Minister for Education Indranee Rajah (at right) making a point at a session held by Uplift at the Ministry of Education in Buona Vista. The discussion included community strategies to tackle long-term absenteeism. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

It was the fifth public engagement session by the task force, which was set up last year to boost support for disadvantaged students from lower-income households.

Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sam Tan, who is also a task force member and was at the session, encouraged participants to tap the resources available in their locales, such as grassroots networks.

"It takes a constituency to raise a child," he quipped.

Participant Martin Chok, senior manager for youth services at voluntary welfare organisation Care Corner, said a mentoring programme could provide longer-term support for families.

Details of Uplift's recommendations will be announced and implemented this year. They will be tracked and evaluated over a one- to two-year period to ensure they are effective, said the Education Ministry.

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ocbc.com/cny

How well prepared are NSmen for their tasks?

Calvin Yang and Lim Min Zhang

One is a sales executive who serves as a combat medic when he reports for his annual in-camp training (ICT). Yet he wonders if a four-day course on performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation and setting up intravenous drips, among other areas covered, is ample refresher training should the need to save the lives of fellow soldiers arise.

Another is a business undergraduate who returned for his ICT last year, after three years away from the Bionix armoured vehicle that he commands.

"After our ORD (operationally ready date), we don't touch the equipment for a few years and have lost touch with them," said the Bionix vehicle commander, adding that his peers were "more chill" than during his active days. "Sometimes, in ICTs, people cut corners because they want to save time."

Such sentiments are not unusual among the country's operationally ready national servicemen (NSmen), who are also civilians with day jobs and various commitments.

The debate on whether NSmen are well-prepped for their tasks during their ICTs has come under the spotlight in the past week, following the death of Singapore actor Aloysius Pang, 28, last Wednesday.

An armament technician from the 268th Battalion Singapore Artillery, Corporal First Class (NS) Pang was on ICT duty during a military exercise in New Zealand.

He was part of a team called in last Saturday to diagnose a suspected fault inside a Singapore Self-Propelled Howitzer (SSPH).

Before the diagnosis could begin, the gun barrel had to be lowered to a neutral position. But the actor could not get out of the way in time and was crushed between the end of the barrel and the interior of the howitzer. This caused chest and abdominal injuries that led to his death.

The fatal incident is the fifth reported by the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) since September 2017, following four preceding years of zero training- and operations-related fatalities.

RUSTY SKILLS AND UNMOTIVATED?

Investigations are ongoing, but the high-profile death has sparked contrasting reactions to the SAF's deployment of NSmen and the support the men receive to ensure that they could carry out their duties during ICTs.

Some NSmen interviewed by The Sunday Times said they were concerned that they did not practise their vocational skills for long periods.

At a media briefing last Thursday, Colonel Terry Tan, commander of the Combat Service Support Command, said CFC Pang was qualified and competent to carry out his work as an armament technician.

Col Tan said the actor had undergone refresher training when he reported for his ICT duty in New Zealand and also completed seven ICT stints. If it is beyond the competency of the forward maintenance platoon – which CFC Pang was part of – regular technicians would be asked to come forward to diagnose the fault, added Col Tan.

Yet some NSmen interviewed were unsure if the few days or weeks allocated for refresher training could reacquaint them with their vocational skill sets and allow them to pick up where they left off.

For instance, steering an armoured vehicle was unlike driving a car, pointed out one NSman, who is in an armour unit.

"We have familiarisation drives. But it takes time to adjust to steering an armoured vehicle again, especially when one hasn't driven one for a long time," said the NSman.

Some NSmen said they had observed their peers being uninterested in updating themselves and seeing ICTs as "a break from work".

An NSman in an infantry unit said: "The atmosphere is more relaxed than our active days. So there are some who come to slack and while their time away. There needs to be more urgency and initiative."

Others, however, believe the processes to equip these Singaporean sons for their roles have improved over the years – but the onus is on the individual to do his part.

Observers interviewed also remain confident that NSmen today are competent and qualified.

Mr Kurt Wee, president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises and a member of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence, said he does not think it is a question of the NSmen's unfamiliarity with the drills, adding that they are trained and certified before undertaking certain roles.

"But sometimes there are unexpected situations that present themselves, and accidents can happen as a result," he said.

Defence analyst Ho Shu Huang of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies also believes the systems to train NSmen well "are in place and regularly improved".



SAF regulars and NSmen taking part in an open mobilisation exercise last year. Observers are confident that NSmen are competent and qualified. ST FILE PHOTO

"What unfortunately is beyond the SAF's control is the level of interest, motivation and attention individual NSmen demonstrate.

"NSmen invariably face competing demands for their time and attention. Competency can be developed, and any inconveniences can be overcome if an NSman is sufficiently motivated," he added.

"The million-dollar question then is what would motivate NSmen?"

NSMEN A CORE OF SAF

But observers said it is necessary for Singapore, being a small nation, to continue relying heavily on NSmen, whose sacrifices over the decades have helped the country develop a respected defence force.

Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Joan Pereira, deputy chair of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Foreign Affairs, said NSmen are a core part of the force, "given that Singapore has a small resident population and has to meet its defence needs without crippling our labour force needs as well".

According to the Global Firepower, an index of countries' military strength, Singapore's military personnel total over 500,000, with some 432,500 reserve personnel.

The same index has Taiwan's total military personnel at 1,932,500, with 1,675,000 of them reserves. Israel's total is 615,000, with 445,000 reserve personnel.

Underscoring the view of NSmen as the SAF's backbone, Mr Ho pointed out that the term reservist was replaced with "operationally ready national serviceman" more than 20 years ago to plainly show they are not second-tier soldiers, as the previous term had implied.

"The end of one's full-time service merely marks the entry of a new phase of front-line service, not a relegation to the rear," he added.

After their full-time service, NSmen are liable to be called back for ICT of up to 40 days a year, serving as NSmen until age 40. For officers and senior military experts, the liability is until age 50.

Nee Soon GRC MP Henry Kwek, who also sits on the GPC for Defence and Foreign Affairs, said NSmen serve on the front line along with the regulars and full-time national servicemen (NSFs).

"Ensuring that SAF stays effective is a tremendous task sustained by the contributions of our NSmen, and the support of their families and employers," he added.

RECOMMENDATIONS

But some have questioned if it is wise for an NSman to be expected to handle heavy machinery after a period of absence from it.

Unlike professionals who work on these huge machines daily, an NSman's experience is limited to those few weeks of training yearly.

Mr Mark Lim Xian Jin, who wrote to ST Forum last Thursday, said expecting NSFs and NSmen to be able to handle and maintain complex machinery, such as tanks and artillery, "seems unwise".

"Mindef can instead employ a much larger team of full-time maintenance personnel, outside of the NSF population, to reduce the need for young NSFs to handle unfamiliar heavy machinery," he added. "There may be better solutions than the ones I have proposed, given the many challenges Mindef faces."

Yet, others said it was necessary to tap NSmen for non-combat roles. Civilian technicians could not be expected to go into battle, said adjunct film lecturer Eternality Tan, who is an automotive technician in his NS vocation.

"Having civilian technicians as operational support is useful because of their vast experience and expertise, particularly in diagnosing faults and techniques to rectify them.

"Sometimes, we may need to rely on them," said the NSman, who completed his ICT two weeks ago.

"But in terms of combat skills, we really have to rely on our soldiers."

Ms Pereira said the challenge was in ensuring that NSmen underwent adequate training without affecting their other commitments.

She suggested using digital tools and online portals so that NSmen could be trained more frequently outside their ICTs.

"Regular training helps to maintain the readiness of our forces, but training that is too time-consuming or takes place too frequently could affect the other commitments of our NSmen," she said.

Mr Ho added that "as much as we see it is the SAF's organisational responsibility to ensure safe training... people, including NSmen, form that organisation".

"Everyone has a part to play, first by taking training seriously and paying attention to what they or others are doing. After all, NS training, by virtue of what one is training for, is inherently risky."

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• Additional reporting by Lester Wong

Non-stop flow of mourners at actor's wake

Fans, celebrities, politicians, strangers turn up to pay their respects, some as early as 10am

Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

Grieving fans, celebrity co-workers, politicians, and even strangers turned up in the thousands yesterday to pay their respects to actor Aloysius Pang, who died last Wednesday from injuries suffered during a military exercise in New Zealand.

Even though the morning session at a multipurpose hall in MacPherson Lane was reserved for Mr Pang's close friends, family and VIPs, people started streaming in at about 10am, forming a line to enter the wake. The public memorial began at noon, and the crowd flow never let up after that.

It did not matter that many of those who spoke to The Sunday Times were not fans of Mr Pang's and simply wanted to pay their respects to someone who they said had "gone too soon".

One of them, retiree Hong Lee Yan, 72, had taken a 1½-hour bus ride from her home in Kranji. She said in Mandarin as she choked back tears: "I have seen him on TV, but I don't remember the names of his roles or his shows. I came because I am so saddened that this tragedy had to happen at all.

"Anyone who is a mother or a grandmother must feel for his parents. I cry every time I read anything about him."

The Ministry of Defence said Corporal First Class (NS) Pang Wei Chong, 28, who was with the 268th Battalion Singapore Artillery, had been carrying out repair work inside a Singapore Self-Propelled Howitzer last Saturday when he got caught between the gun barrel, as it was being lowered, and the cabin.

He was evacuated to Waikato Hospital, a regional trauma centre in Hamilton, south of Auckland, where his condition deteriorated, despite undergoing three operations.

His body was flown to Paya Lebar Air Base on a Republic of Singapore Air Force KC-135R tanker aircraft on Friday.

Mr Pang's death was the fifth reported since September 2017, following four years of zero training- and operations-related fatalities.

His two older brothers were seen attending to friends and visitors throughout the day.

Private-hire car driver Benson Seow, 45, who brought a small bouquet of flowers, said he hoped the authorities would do more to ensure the safety of national servicemen.

Teenager Jimmy Han, 17, came in a jacket borrowed from his father, even though it was one size too large. He said: "I wanted to look formal for this. It's my way of showing him respect."

Among the celebrities who attended there were Jeanette Aw, Joanne Peh, Chen Hanwei, Christopher Lee and Fann Wong.

Mr Pang's actress girlfriend Jayley Woo, 27, wearing sunglasses, needed assistance when walking away from the wake.

Actress Zoe Tay, 51, also broke down in tears as she told The Sunday Times she had looked forward to working with Mr Pang again.

"I worked with Aloysius on only one show but I could see that he was such a polite, humble and hard-working young man," said Tay, who had acted alongside him in the 2015 Channel 8 medical drama You Can Be An Angel Too .

Politicians, including Minister for National Development Lawrence Wong and MP Tin Pei Ling, also arrived to pay their respects, as did members of the 268th Battalion Singapore Artillery.

Mr Pang's official fan club, known as the Pangsters, came in a group wearing the club's official T-shirts. The group of 100 mostly teenage girls huddled together and sobbed as they waited to enter the wake.

Even though emotions ran high, the wake was a hushed affair, with quiet instrumental music playing in the background. Two large screens on both sides of the coffin played a loop of Mr Pang's photos and video clips. Dozens of wreaths lined the entrance and exit, and strings of colourful paper cranes hung along one side of the multipurpose hall.

The public memorial continues until noon today. Mr Pang will be accorded the full honours of a military funeral, and his cremation will be held at Mandai Crematorium at 5pm.

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MOVED TO TEARS

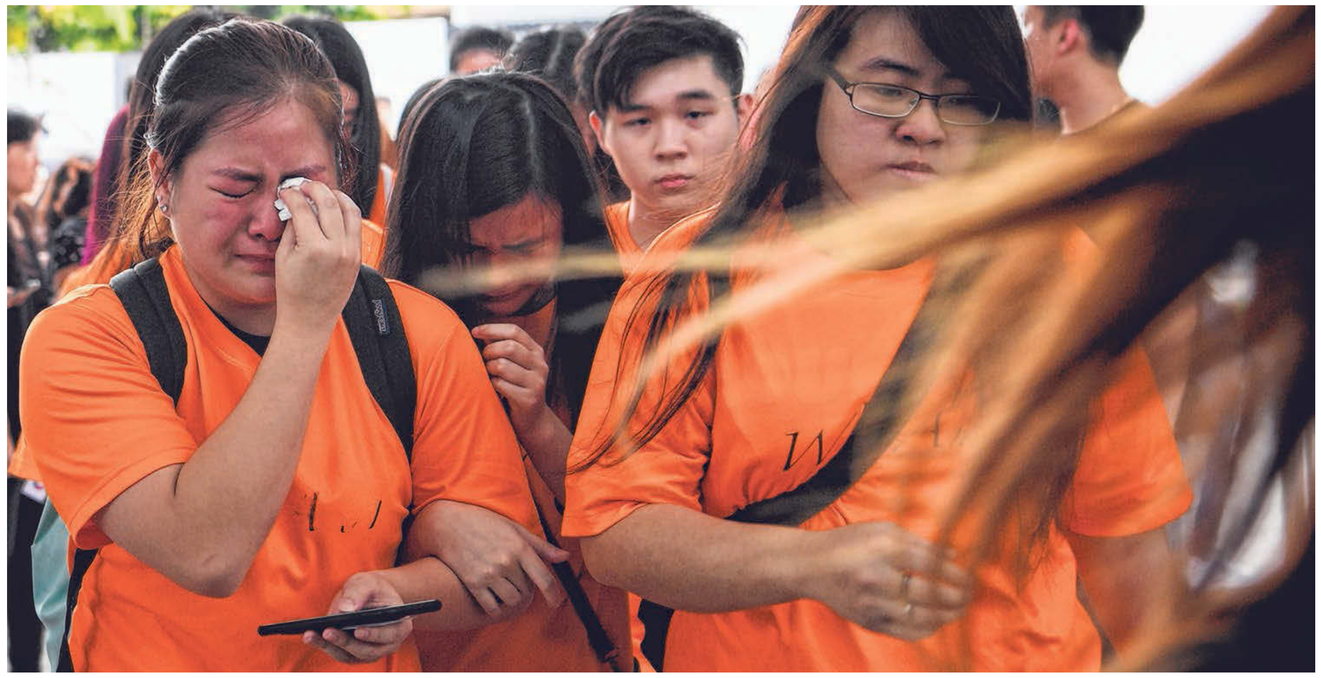
I have seen him on TV, but I don't remember the names of his roles or his shows. I came because I am so saddened that this tragedy had to happen at all... Anyone who is a mother or a grandmother must feel for his parents. I cry every time I read anything about him.

MADAM HONG LEE YAN, 72, a retiree, saying in Mandarin as she choked back tears. She took a 1½-hour bus ride from her home in Kranji to attend the wake.

A SIGN OF RESPECT

I wanted to look formal for this. It's my way of showing him respect.

JIMMY HAN, 17, who came in a jacket borrowed from his father, even though it was one size too large.



People weeping as they left the wake yesterday. Mourners started streaming in at about 10am, forming a line to pay their last respects. The public memorial began at noon. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG





Above: Mr Pang's official fan club, known as the Pangsters, came in a group wearing the club's official T-shirts.

Left: Actor Elvin Ng (far left) consoles Mr Pang's girlfriend Jayley Woo. ST PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG



Among the celebrities who came to pay their respects were actors Rayson Tan (left) and Chen Shucheng. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



Also spotted among the mourners were celebrities Christopher Lee (centre) and Fann Wong (beside him). ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



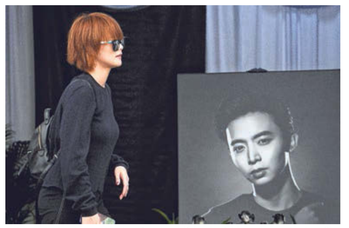
From right: Actors Xu Bin and Ian Fang, close friends of Mr Pang, at the wake. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Actress Jeanette Aw at the wake. Even though emotions ran high, the wake was a hushed affair, with quiet instrumental music. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO



Actress and model Sheila Sim (left) and actor Chen Hanwei arriving at the wake. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Actress Jayley Woo, Aloysius Pang's girlfriend, at his wake yesterday. She wrote an Instagram post saying that as they were not fortunate in this life, they must be husband and wife in their next life. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Big dreams and hopes of settling down – all dashed



Aloysius Pang was due to play his first male lead in a series and was planning to marry his girlfriend. PHOTO: ALOYSIUS PANG/INSTAGRAM

This was meant to be an important year for Aloysius Pang. It was going to be one of "major decisions" and "bolder changes", as he described in an Instagram post on New Year's Day.

Professionally, the 28-year-old actor was poised for his major breakthrough, while on the personal front, he was intending to eventually settle down with his actress girlfriend, Jayley Woo.

But those dreams and aspirations were ended just weeks later, with his death following an accident during a military exercise while serving as an operationally ready national serviceman (NSman) in New Zealand.

Film-maker Joyce Lee, who directed him in the film Young & Fabulous (2016), told The Sunday Times they had many conversations about his plans for the future.

"Life has been so unfair to him. How can God take everything away from him? He told me he wanted to make a lot of films and save up for his parents so that they can retire. He loved them so much," she said.

Mr Pang was due to shoot the Channel 8 romance drama My One In A Million after Chinese New Year – a role that his talent manager Dasmond Koh said Mr Pang had been waiting for, for years.

"This is the first time he would be playing the main male lead of a drama series," Mr Koh had said at a press conference following news of Mr Pang's accident.

Even as he recuperated following the first of three operations, Mr Pang had spoken to his mother – who had flown to Waikato Hospital in Hamilton last Sunday to be with her youngest child – about how much he was looking forward to the role, said Mr Koh.

"Aloysius is someone who loves work. He told his mother he wanted to get well as soon as possible so that he could get started on the new series," added Mr Koh.

Mr Pang had also harboured hopes of being a director someday and had already penned at least six film scripts, revealed his close actor friend Ian Fang, 29, in an interview with The Sunday Times.

Without disclosing more details, Mr Fang said he would try to direct some of those scripts himself and bring the stories to life.

Known within the entertainment industry for his professionalism and hardworking attitude, the source of Mr Pang's work ethic was not just his passion for the craft – he had planned to save up so that he could tie the knot with his girlfriend in a few years.

Their relationship was only made public by Ms Woo in a heartbreaking Instagram post after his death, accompanied by a photo of what appears to be her holding on to his hand in the hospital. She had written in Chinese: "I am not fortunate enough to be your wife in this lifetime – we must be husband and wife in our next life."

Her twin sister Hayley followed up with a post on her own Instagram account, where she detailed a conversation she had with Mr Pang last December on her birthday: "You told me that you were working hard to earn money so that when you were about 31 years old, you would marry my sister."

Mr Pang was a filial son and had plans to save up money to take care of his parents.

In a conversation that a Lianhe Zaobao reporter had with him two months ago, she recalled in a column that he had said that although he wished to try working overseas, he would have a tough time leaving the country as he felt he had a responsibility to look after his "ageing parents" here.

He loved his family deeply, as they did him.

When his second eldest brother Kenny landed at Changi Airport after flying back from New Zealand last Thursday, he had told the media that Aloysius had always been "the precious of our family".

Mr Kenny Pang said: "He's the youngest, he's the most loved. We called him *xiao gua tou* (little melon head)... I think his main priority has always been the love for his parents and that has not changed."

His sibling had begun that New Year's Day Instagram post with the words "2018 flew by in a jiffy".

In a cruel twist of fate, Aloysius Pang's journey also ended far too abruptly.

Yip Wai Yee

300 missing in Brazil mining dam collapse

Nearly 200 people rescued, nine bodies recovered as search efforts continue



Rescue crew searching for missing people after a tailings dam burst at an iron ore mine owned by Brazilian miner Vale, in Brumadinho, Brazil, last Friday. The cause of the rupture is still not known. The recent collapse comes three years after a similar disaster in November 2015, when the collapse of a larger dam killed 19 people in Brazil's worst environmental disaster. PHOTO: REUTERS



Damage caused by the bursting of the dam. Iron ore prices could rise in the wake of the disaster, due to less supply in the short term. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



A puppy being cleaned of mud after the collapse of the dam, which released a wave of red iron ore waste. PHOTO: DPA

SURVIVORS UNLIKELY

Unfortunately, at this point, the chances of finding survivors are minimal. We're likely to just be rescuing bodies.

MR ROMEU ZEMA, governor of the mining-intensive state of Minas Gerais where the disaster struck, on the progress of the rescue effort.

BRUMADINHO (Brazil) • Brazilian rescue workers yesterday searched for roughly 300 missing people after a tailings dam burst at an iron ore mine owned by Vale, amid faint hopes of finding many alive, three years after a similar disaster involving the miner.

Nine people have been found dead after the dam burst last Friday, while nearly 200 people have been rescued, according to firemen running the rescue effort in the town of Brumadinho.

"Unfortunately, at this point, the chances of finding survivors are minimal. We're likely to just be rescuing bodies," Mr Romeu Zema, governor of the mining-intensive state of Minas Gerais where the disaster struck, told local press.

The death toll was expected to rise sharply, according to Mr Avimar de Melo Barcelos, mayor of the town of Brumadinho located near the mine. The cause of the rupture is not known.

Rescuers have mapped out four points where people could still be found alive, including a cafeteria buried in sludge around lunchtime, a police spokesman said.

Search dogs were being flown in from Rio de Janeiro.

All of those missing are Vale employees or contractors, the spokesman said.

Mr Renato Simao de Oliveiras, 32, was searching hospitals and with the police for his brother, who had worked for Vale for six years, and was despairing at the lack of information.

"I heard about it when I was at work. I called him several times but couldn't get a hold of him," he said. "We're lost, we don't know anything."

The state is still recovering from the collapse in November 2015 of a larger dam that killed 19 people in Brazil's worst environmental disaster. That dam, owned by the Samarco Mineracao joint venture between Vale and BHP Group, buried a village and poured toxic waste into a major river.

A state judge ordered Vale to freeze one billion reals (S$359 million) in its accounts, to be held against damage caused by the dam rupture.

President Jair Bolsonaro was set to visit Minas Gerais and fly over the disaster area yesterday, after dispatching three ministers there last Friday.

Vale chief executive Fabio Schvartsman said the dam that burst last Friday at the Feijao iron mine was being decommissioned and its capacity was about a fifth of the total waste spilled at Samarco.

He said equipment had shown the dam was stable on Jan 10 and it was too soon to say why it collapsed.

The Feijao mine is one of four in Vale's Paraopeba complex, which includes two processing plants and produced 26 million tonnes of iron ore in 2017, or about 7 per cent of Vale's total output, according to information on the company's website. Mr Schvartsman declined to say how output would be affected.

Operations at Samarco remain halted over new licensing, while the companies have worked to pay damages out of court, including an agreement that quashed a 20 billion reals civil lawsuit last year.

Federal prosecutors suspended but have still not closed an even larger lawsuit.

Iron ore prices are likely to rise in the wake of the disaster as there may be less supply on the market for the short term, said Mr Chris LaFemina, a Jefferies mining industry analyst. REUTERS

Michael Jackson sex abuse documentary sends shock waves



HELPING SURVIVORS

We've been looking for a platform to be able to tell the truth. This film was nothing we ever thought about or sought out. It came to us individually... We can't change what happened to us. We can't do anything about stopping Michael. He's dead. That's gone. What happened, happened. The feeling is, 'What can we do now?' Hopefully, it helps other survivors feel less isolated.

MR WADE ROBSON, on the hope that the documentary will have a positive effect on sexual abuse survivors.



Singer Michael Jackson with an unidentified boy in a still from Leaving Neverland, which details the extent of the abuse of two men, who were then minors, with explicit and graphic accounts. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

UTAH • A new four-hour documentary, Leaving Neverland, in which two accusers share stories of how they were sexually abused as children by the late pop singer Michael Jackson, sent shock waves through the Sundance Film Festival at its premiere last Friday.

The claims made by Mr Wade Robson and Mr James Safechuck are a matter of public record, as both men were involved in multiple lawsuits brought against Jackson's companies beginning in 2013. (The cases were later dismissed for being outside the statute of limitations.)

Directed by Bafta winner Dan Reed, the documentary – set to be shown in two two-hour parts on HBO – details the extent of the abuse with explicit and graphic accounts. It also describes how both of them were groomed, then abused, in their childhood.

Their stories have a similar thread: Both were younger than 10 when they first encountered Jackson, both were abused for an extended period of time and both had star-struck mothers who were unaware of what was going on.

Mr Robson accused Jackson of repeated sexual abuse when he was between the ages of seven and 14.

He developed strong fandom for Jackson at a young age, his "walls plastered" with posters, said yesterday's report in The Guardian about the documentary.

Mr Robson met Jackson at the age of five after winning a contest emulating the singer's dance moves.

When they were alone, he and Jackson allegedly engaged in a number of sexual activities, the report added.

Mr Safechuck alleged that he was sexually abused from the time he was 10 until he hit puberty. He met Jackson after clinching a role in a Pepsi advertisement and similarly developed a friendship, accompanying Jackson on tour.

Their friendship was said to have turned sexual when they were left alone by the child's unaware mother and allowed to share hotel rooms. Jackson allegedly introduced him to masturbation, which was seen as a form of "bonding", The Guardian's report added.

Mr Safechuck recalled that Jackson said he had performed oral sex on him while he was asleep. He also told the boy that he was Jackson's first sexual experience and that it was an "acceptable way of experiencing your love", the report said.

In a statement before the Sundance premiere, the Jackson estate declared: "This is yet another lurid production in an outrageous and pathetic attempt to exploit and cash in on Michael Jackson."

The estate has not responded to a request for comment after the premiere.

Because both men initially testified on Jackson's behalf when he was accused of sexual abuse in 1993 – saying that they never had any sexual experiences with the singer (Mr Robson repeated that when he testified again in 2005 at Jackson's trial in Santa Barbara County) – their credibility has come under heavy scrutiny from Jackson's fans.

The documentary explains at some length not only why both men originally defended Jackson, but what made them go public with their accusations when they did.

In an emotional question-and-answer session after the packed screening, director Reed discussed the process of getting Mr Robson and Mr Safechuck to open up for extensive on-camera interviews.

Mr Robson and Mr Safechuck, who were at the screening, were visibly moved by an applauding crowd and discussed their motivations for taking part in the project.

At the time that both men made their court filings, Mr Reed said he saw that "it might mean for the first time, someone might be able to tell the story of what actually happened" between Jackson and young boys.

Mr Robson and Mr Safechuck said they had been trying to communicate with each other for years. But during the legal process, they were forbidden to discuss the details of what had happened.

Both did not receive compensation for appearing in the documentary. "From the get-go, there was no money ever offered and we never expected anything," Mr Safechuck said.

"It was really trying to tell the story and shine a light on it. To give people (who have survived abuse) the same connection and comfort we've got going through this," he said.

"We've been looking for a platform to be able to tell the truth," Mr Robson said. "This film was nothing we ever thought about or sought out. It came to us individually."

Mr Robson and Mr Safechuck said they hoped the film would have a positive effect on sexual abuse survivors.

"We can't change what happened to us," Mr Robson said. "We can't do anything about stopping Michael. He's dead. That's gone. What happened, happened. The feeling is, 'What can we do now?' Hopefully, it helps other survivors feel less isolated." DPA

Fee disparity at different hospitals 'not uncommon'

They vary due to equipment, implants and approaches taken by surgeons, say observers

Calvin Yang

Treatment fees quoted by various public healthcare institutions for a particular medical condition can differ by as much as 60 per cent.

This begs the question: Why pay more at one institution if you can get it for cheaper at another?

However, such fee disparities are not uncommon, observers told The Sunday Times.

This comes after a 71-year-old, who needed a cataract and glaucoma operation, was quoted two prices by two public healthcare institutions: $19,000 by the National University Hospital (NUH) and $9,000 – or about half as much – by the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC). Dr Wong Kai Peng's forum letter on the disparity was published in The Straits Times on Jan 15.

NUH chief executive Eugene Liu, in a reply to the letter on Wednesday, pointed out that the two institutions had recommended different treatment options after assessing his eye condition.

The option recommended by NUH "included both a laser procedure for cataract extraction with implant and a glaucoma surgery with another implant", said Dr Liu. "We understand that SNEC had recommended a different treatment option, without a laser procedure and with a different glaucoma implant."

Observers interviewed are not surprised by such wide fee ranges.

Two surgeons in the same field can take different approaches to treat the same condition, each with its merits and drawbacks, said Dr Chia Shi Lu, chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health. The resulting fees, therefore, may vary due to factors like the chosen equipment, implants and consumables used.

"I am fairly sure in this particular case, for the same procedure and instruments, the cost would be quite similar in both hospitals," he added.

Dr Claudine Pang, consultant ophthalmologist at Asia Retina Eye Surgery Centre, said the approach taken varies with "each surgeon's clinical judgment, experience, surgical skills and prior training".

"One surgeon may have the ability to treat a complex condition by doing multiple procedures in one surgery, while another surgeon may choose to treat the condition in stages. Neither is right or wrong as different surgeons have different experiences with different methods."

Fee benchmarks for common medical procedures are published on the Health Ministry's website to boost transparency and rein in rising healthcare costs. A check on the site finds that there could be a fairly wide range of fees. For instance, an unsubsidised nasendoscopy (with upper respiratory tract infection) costs $198 at NUH. A similar procedure, however, may cost $603 at the Singapore General Hospital.

The different restructured hospitals have a high level of autonomy, such as in their operations and service organisation, said Dr Jeremy Lim of consultancy firm Oliver Wyman. "Hence, it is to be expected that the cost structures would be different and, without specific design, this would flow into prices."

While some observers note that standardising the fees may address patients' confusion over costs, most believe this approach could undermine Singapore's efforts to be a medical hub.

Dr Chia said: "If there is blanket standardisation, as has been tried in some countries, hospitals and doctors may be reluctant to tackle complex cases as it becomes non-viable, leading to many problems, including de-skilling and patient marginalisation, and that's why such schemes generally do not persist."

Ms Joan Pereira, a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health, said: "While there is scope for review, rather than expecting fee benchmarks to be the same across restructured hospitals, it may make more sense to provide a more detailed breakdown on the cost components of the fees in order to help patients make a more informed decision."

Dr Muhd Taufiq Rashid, a resident physician at Dr Tan and Partners @ Somerset, advised patients to ask for the breakdown of costs in a procedure .

"Patients are extremely knowledgeable these days, with the advent of online content and social media," he said.

"So they may do some research to better understand what they need, what they are prepared to pay and who they would like to serve them."

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Fortune Up
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Find the Golden Ang Bao
Walk away with over $88,888 worth of vouchers & attractive prizes. Simply spend a min. of $488 in a single receipt to participate at COURTS MEGASTORE.
MEGASTORE
Free Limited Edition Collectibles
Limited Stocks
Prosperity Packets
Gold Bar Tissue Box
Purchase -with- Purchase from $8
Congratulations to the lucky winner of an Xbox One S at Lot One! More prizes await to be won!
Last Few Sets!
Lucky Fortune Bag includes:
• 1 can of New Moon abalone
• $8 COURTS Vouchers
• Restaurant Vouchers
• Mary Chia Group Vouchers
Additionally: Stand a chance to win the latest technology such as:
• 45" Full HD LED TV
• Xbox Gaming Console
• GoPro HERO7 Action Camera
• Dyson Supersonic Hairdryer
Lucky Fortune Bag worth $99.90
While stocks last. Conditions apply.
Iona 2.8L Steamboat/ Multi-Cooker worth $69.90
$30 COURTS voucher
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COURTS


Mr Ren Zhengfei co-founded what was then the Shenzhen Huawei Technologies company in 1987. In 1993, the company made its first major breakthrough when it launched what was then the most powerful telephone exchange switch in China. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Rise of Huawei – from balloon sale to telco giant

How a discharged army engineering officer built a conglomerate out of practically nothing

Lim Yan Liang
China Correspondent
In Beijing

Huawei Technologies is known today for its sleek smartphones packing futuristic hardware, and the company recently eclipsed Apple to become the second-largest smartphone maker in the world.

From its humble roots as a seven-man operation, the firm now has 180,000 employees across 170 countries and regions. Last year, Huawei broke US$100 billion (S$135 billion) in revenue for the first time with year-on-year growth of over 20 per cent.

No doubt one of China's greatest corporate success stories, the tech giant has also come under intense spotlight in recent months as long-brewing espionage and security concerns by the US and its allies boiled over.

The company's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, who is also a daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei, was arrested in Canada last month at the request of the US authorities and is facing possible extradition to the US on charges of violating sanctions against Iran.

This is the story of how a scrappy trading company became a multinational corporate empire in the last three decades.

BALLOONS, FIRE ALARMS AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

In 1984, China had emerged from the tumultuous decade of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and had shifted gears to building its economy under Deng Xiaoping's reform-minded leadership.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) began to demobilise millions of soldiers, and Mr Ren, an army engineering officer for a decade, was discharged with the disbanding of the engineering corps.

Already 40, Mr Ren joined a Shenzhen electronics firm, but his lack of experience saw him cheated out of over two million yuan by others.

"Because of this fiasco, he was forced to resign from the group," said former Huawei employee Yang Shaolong, who wrote a book chronicling the firm's rise.

Heavily in debt and jobless, Mr Ren and six friends pooled 21,000 yuan to found what was then the Shenzhen Huawei Technologies company in 1987.

While Huawei was nominally a tech firm, none of its founders had business experience and Mr Yang said that in the early days, they traded anything to make money. "They sold balloons, fire alarms and at one time, they even sold dietary supplements," wrote Mr Yang.

Mr Ren cottoned on to the growing demand for telephone exchange switches in the late 1980s, and Huawei became one of hundreds of firms that imported and resold these machines, which helped organisations manage their own private telephone networks.

The firm tasted early success by reverse engineering imported hardware to create its own models. In 1993, Huawei made its first major breakthrough when it launched what was then the most powerful telephone exchange switch in China.

Shortly after, the company was awarded a contract with the PLA to help build a national telecommunications network, further pushing the brand into the mainstream.

Huawei was the only domestic telecoms equipment maker to take part in the first Beijing International Telecommunications Exhibition in 1994.

Mr Ren made a bold prediction: In a decade, the market would be split three ways, among Siemens, Alcatel and Huawei.

NETWORKING JUGGERNAUT ENTERS THE HANDSET MARKET

Mr Ren's words proved to be prescient. By 2004, the company was involved in 14 of the 19 3G networks being built globally, and overseas earnings exceeded domestic revenue.

By then, Huawei had embarked on its push into overseas markets in earnest, backed by more than US$10 billion in credit from China's state banks. It slashed prices by as much as 70 per cent to undercut the competition and gain market share. In 2012, it overtook Swedish firm Ericsson to become the world's largest telecoms equipment vendor.

But Huawei was not keen on just owning the infrastructure space – it wanted the consumer end of the market as well.

In 2003, it began to make its own mobile phones, starting with low-cost, telco-branded handsets. It gradually moved up the value chain, expanding into laptops and other consumer electronics.

In 2014, it began working with luxury camera maker Leica to offer flagship-grade smartphones with premium cameras and soon began dominating the smartphone space as well.

MILITARY LINK, CLOSE TIES WITH BEIJING A CONSTANT BUGBEAR

Mr Ren's military background is clearly apparent from Huawei's guiding principles. It famously espouses a "wolf culture", in which a high-pressure environment coupled with attractive compensation breeds an aggressive approach to business.

As an army officer, Mr Ren also joined the Chinese Communist Party and participated in the 12th national party congress in 1982.

Company lore has it that he thoroughly absorbed the Collected Works Of Mao Zedong and On War by Carl von Clausewitz during his college years, when the Cultural Revolution was raging across China.

"He later applied the lessons learnt to the management of Huawei," said Mr Yang. "In many ways, these enabled the company to survive in an extremely hostile environment."

When Huawei launched its own university in 1998, the emphasis was on a military approach to business, added Mr Yang. The university's theme was "the market is a battlefield".

Will bans stymie Huawei's march to 5G dominance? Deep investments in research and development have always been at the core of Huawei, which allocated US$60 billion in R&D over the past decade, and the amount is expected to rise to more than US$100 billion (S$135 billion) over the next five years.

Experts said Huawei is among a handful of firms including Cisco, Ericsson and Qualcomm that will emerge as early winners as 5G cellphone technology begins to roll out globally this year.

Huawei is aiming for a big slice of this pie. "Compared with Qualcomm and other competing 5G chipsets, we are at least half a year ahead of them, if not three-quarters of a year ahead," its head of consumer business Richard Yu said.

"Maybe I'm not humble, but we're indeed leading the industry (and) the strongest in 5G infrastructure."

But fears that Huawei's equipment could be used by Beijing for spying has led to a growing number of Western countries applying the brakes on its hardware as part of their national 5G plans.

Besides the US, the governments of New Zealand and Australia have moved to block the use of Huawei's equipment in future 5G networks.

Amid security concerns, Japanese and British telcos have also said they will not use Huawei's 5G equipment, while also removing its hardware from their 4G networks.

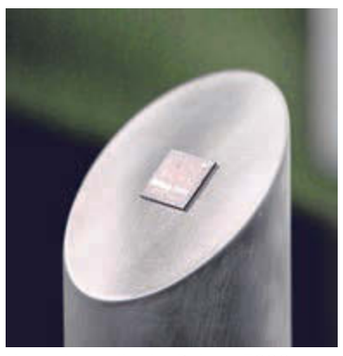
Canada is also mulling over a similar prohibition on Huawei supplying equipment for its 5G networks, following the arrest of its CFO.

The studiously low-profile Mr Ren has come out to reject the accusations against his company.

"Today, I still love my country. I support the Communist Party of China. But I will never do anything to harm any other nation," he said.

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Huawei's 9 sq km headquarters in Dongguan, China, has its own train stop and can house 25,000 employees. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG


Huawei unveils the Balong 5000 chipset, intended for use in 5G devices. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



Huawei's offices in Lusaka, Zambia. By 2004, the company had embarked on its push into overseas markets, backed by credit from China's state banks. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

China blasts 'unfair and immoral' measures against Huawei

BEIJING • China's Foreign Minister urged countries not to use "fabricated" excuses to block Huawei Technologies, as Vodafone Group joined a list of companies that are shunning the telecommunications equipment supplier.

"Using national power to tarnish and take measures against a certain company, without any evidence, is both unfair and immoral," Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters late on Friday as he wrapped up a trip to France and Italy.

While Mr Wang said every nation was entitled to protect its information security, that approach should not be abused, according to a statement on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website.

He did not mention Huawei by name, or Vodafone's announcement on Friday, but was responding to a question about the recent global crackdown on the Chinese supplier.

The move by Vodafone follows a decision by BT Group to rip Huawei gear out of the backbone of its British mobile network.

Deutsche Telekom, Europe's largest carrier and a major Huawei customer, is also reviewing its purchasing strategy.

US President Donald Trump's administration has been pushing allies to block Huawei from fifth-generation wireless networks, citing fears that China could use its equipment for spying – something the firm's executives have denied.

China's largest telecoms equipment supplier faces bans in the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. BLOOMBERG


Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged nations not to use "fabricated" excuses to block the Chinese telecoms giant.



Good for

- me
- my environment



Every day, we make choices that have an impact on our environment. There are many opportunities for us to make a difference. Every action, big or small, plays a part.

Here are how some everyday individuals and businesses do what is good for themselves and the environment.

Learn more at cgs.sg/environmentandus

UPCYCLING PLAYTIME

Sophia Huang
EDITOR, WRITER, FULL-TIME MUM

"I try not to buy toys for my children. I would rather make them with upcycled materials. It teaches them the importance of working with their hands and helps ignite their imagination. Just as importantly, it helps reduce general waste. It's appalling how much trash our household can go through each week. So, I don't like to just throw something away without at least thinking what else it can be used for.

I first got into upcycling after I had my first child. Before that, I had no idea just how expensive children's toys could be! My first major project was a kitchen playset I made from cardboard for my daughter, which cost me just $6 and a little of my time.

Ever since I started this with my kids, it has led me to more initiatives involving children and the environment. Now I run a Facebook page to teach other parents how to do what I do, I write children's books about human relationships with nature, and I give school talks to try and instil a love for nature in the young. I hope the future generation will learn to love creating and not just consuming."

View her upcycling tips at:
fb.com/CraftcycleForKids





Lim Wei Jie
FOUNDER OF FOREWORD COFFEE

A TASTE OF PASSION

"While I run a coffee company, I see no point in my passion for coffee unless I can do something worthwhile with it. That's the thought that led me to thinking about my business beyond being a conventional coffee joint, and kickstarted the various schemes that support my passion, my business and the environment.

At Foreword Coffee, we have a Bring Your Own Cup policy; rewarding customers with 10% off their beverages. We also stopped giving out straws, switching to using sustainable coffee lids instead.

This might not seem like much, but considering how we dispose of tons of plastic daily, it is still a better alternative than adding to the problem. Most of these plastic items just goes into incinerators, adding to the greenhouse gas effect. What's worse, is how they might even end up in our environment! At the end of the day, I hope that with each cup of coffee we serve, we'll be able to change everyday habits and help everyone do their bit for the environment."

Learn more about his coffee company at:
ForewordCoffee.com
fb.com/ForewordCoffee

THE HIDDEN TRUTH

Pei Shan Yeo | Augustine Tan
CO-FOUNDERS OF UGLYFOOD

"When my Grandma fell ill, I discovered a hidden truth. That for years, I've been wasting perfectly edible food. It was only then that I started researching about healthy diets for my grandmother, and discovered how ugly foods are often being thrown away. That's a huge waste of the natural resources it took to produce them in the first place. Even when they are perfectly edible and as nutritious as other more aesthetically pleasing food.

Together with my partner, Augustine, we researched further into this cosmetic filtering, and realised this massive waste of food could be turned into a business opportunity. That we could do our part in reducing food waste here – which has increased by about 40% in the last 10 years, and continues to do so.

Through working with established mentors in the F&B industry, we developed a range of healthy recipes to transform 'ugly' food into beautiful yet delectable products. First, we started with juices. Now we've expanded to ice creams and fruit teas as well, and we don't plan to stop until everyone starts seeing the beauty in 'ugly' food."

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Grand opening for Wisma Geylang Serai

PM Lee says centre is a symbol of heritage and will also be a social, cultural hub for all Singaporeans

Rahimah Rashith

Geylang Serai is no longer an enclave, but has become a well-integrated community that reflects Singapore's multiracial and multi-religious society, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

In the same spirit, Wisma Geylang Serai (WGS) was conceived to be not just a symbol of heritage and nostalgia for the Malay community but also a vibrant centre where all are welcome, and which reflects the diverse interests and continuing progress of the Malay community, he noted.

In his speech at last night's official launch of the social and cultural heritage hub, PM Lee also pointed to how it will strengthen the cultural identity of the precinct, with its intricate architecture and traditional pitched roofs, and its mix of tenants and activities.

"WGS' aspiration for the future is to build a social and cultural hub in Singapore that brings together the different Malay/Muslim organisations, social and government agencies under one roof. This will allow WGS to provide various programmes and convenience, and this will better fulfil the needs of the community," he said.

Plans for the centre, located in Engku Aman Turn, were first announced by PM Lee at the National Day Rally in August 2011.

Since then, multiple government agencies such as the People's Association, National Arts Council, National Heritage Board (NHB) and various ministries have engaged residents and communities for feedback on how to make the centre part of a modern, vibrant community.

At the launch, Dr Maliki Osman, Senior Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs, said that the hub is a culturally distinctive and inclusive civic centre that celebrates the heritage of Geylang Serai and serves all Singaporeans.

Dr Maliki, who is also the Mayor of South East District, where Geylang Serai is located, said the area "has always been a part of the Singapore fabric, reflecting the heritage of the Malay community interacting with their non-Malay counterparts".

Wisma Geylang Serai will be the centre stage for a variety of services, programmes and community-based activities, and facilities for every segment of society, he added.

Following its official opening, several community facilities and services are now available. They include NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Wisma Geylang Serai, a senior care centre operated by NTUC Health Co-operative Limited and a family service centre run by the Singapore Muslim Women's Association and organised by the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

Another highlight of the centre is the Geylang Serai Heritage Gallery, which opened its doors to the public yesterday. It showcases the history of the area and traces its growth from an outlying settler community in the 19th century to the suburban residential and business precinct it is today.

"We hope that visitors will be enthralled by these lesser-known stories of Geylang Serai, and be inspired to contribute their stories and items to this gallery, as well as upcoming community galleries," said Mr Alvin Tan, NHB's assistant chief executive of policy and community.

Following PM Lee's 2018 National Day Rally announcement to make Geylang Serai a culturally distinct precinct, Dr Maliki said that plans are under way to enhance it further, starting with public consultations to garner ideas.

To commemorate the opening of the centre, there is also a three-day festival, which ends today. It showcases the Malay community's arts, culture and lifestyle with fireworks, outdoor multimedia displays and festive bazaars.

Housewife Yasmin Razak, 52, who visited the festival welcomed the one-stop hub. "To have so many facilities at one convenient location that everyone in the community comes to is brilliant."

rahimahr@sph.com.sg



Above: A three-day festival was held in conjunction with the opening, which included fireworks.

Left: Wisma Geylang Serai will be the centre stage for a variety of services, programmes and community-based activities. ST PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAMAR



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who was at the official opening of the centre, pointed to how it will strengthen the cultural identity of the precinct. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

10 FACTS ABOUT WISMA GEYLANG SERAI

- It is five storeys high and covers an area of 6,700 sq m.
- Decorations include features of Malay traditions.
- It houses Geylang Serai Community Club.
- There is a prayer room.
- The Kurnia@WGS office, a one-stop service centre for eight Malay Muslim organisations, is there.
- The centre can be used as a wedding venue.
- It is the training venue for the Singapore Malay Orchestra.
- A childcare centre will start operating soon.
- There will be a senior care centre.
- There are arts and cultural spaces, including the Malay Heritage Gallery



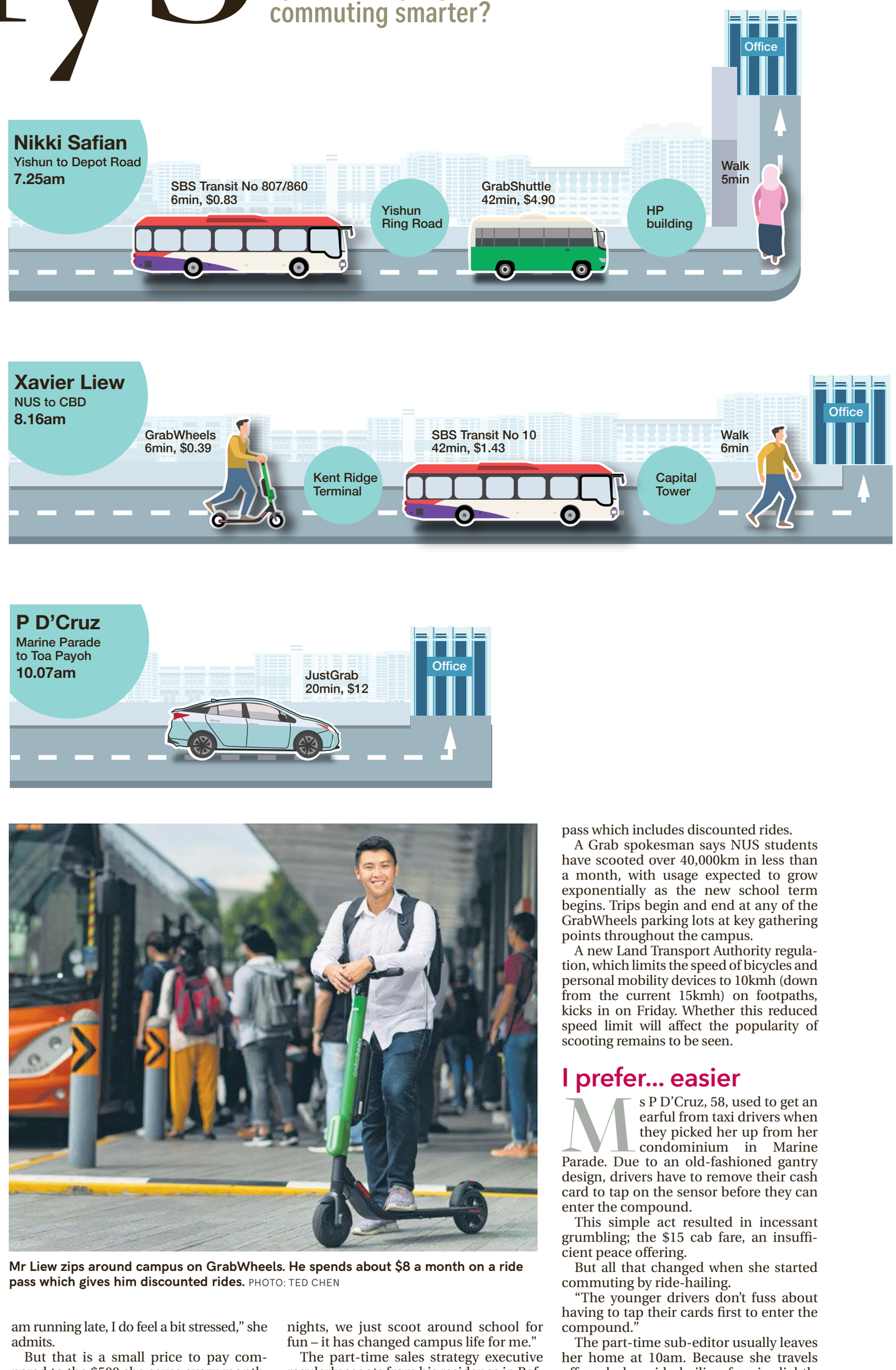
Better **JOURNEYS**

brand**NEWSROOM**

One destination, many ways

A staggering 15.4 million journeys are made daily in Singapore. With more travel options, are people commuting smarter?

CHAN SIEW LIAN



A flying taxi made headlines recently at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, giving the world a glimpse of public transport in the future.

In Singapore, powering up an app unlocks shared electric scooters, on-demand shuttle buses, and soon — if ongoing trials prove successful — autonomous vehicles.

These new modes of transport are aimed at providing commuters with more choices. Paired with the existing public transportation network, they make everyday journeys faster and more efficient.

Mr Lim Kell Jay, head of Grab Singapore, the private operator with the widest range of travel modes, says: "Commuters are already using various shared mobility services daily. However, there are still not enough options in between mass transit services, and taxis or private-hire cars. While many appreciate the comfort of the latter, they have also asked for more affordable options. We are taking the challenge to fill this gap by introducing more innovative services priced for daily use."

Underpinning this evolution is the Land Transport Master Plan (LTMP) 2040 vision of a car-lite Singapore. It imagines a future where nine out of 10 peak-hour journeys will involve walking, cycling, and other car-lite means, and that nine in 10 of these will be completed in 45 minutes or less.

While travel preferences are personal, the end goal is the same — to arrive at the destination safely, quickly, and at a fair price.

The public and private transportation sectors are working together to expand commuting options, as the LTMP panel continues to crowdsource ideas and feedback.

"As Singapore strives towards a car-lite society, commuters will want to choose between different travelling services from both public and private operators, and combine or switch among them seamlessly based on their individual requirements," says Mr Lim.

With less land devoted to roads, spaces for greenery and community facilities can increase, improving the quality of life.

Shorter commutes free up more time for rest. As shared transport services continue to evolve and improve, we look at how three Singaporeans commute daily.

I prefer... cheaper

At 7.25am every weekday, Madam Nikki Safian leaves her Yishun home and walks to the nearest bus stop. She boards an SBS Transit feeder bus and alights six stops later. There, she buys breakfast, and waits for the 23-seater GrabShuttle that will take her from Yishun Ring Road to Depot Road, where she works.

On her return trip, the shuttle drops her at a bus stop close to her block and she walks home.

During her 42-minute commute, Madam Nikki meditates in the morning, and plays mobile games in the evening.

The 54-year-old assistant producer says: "I have a seat guaranteed. And I see the same faces, which I find comforting."

Madam Nikki started taking this route three months ago when she switched jobs. She spends about $200 monthly travelling to and from work. She used to spend $700 monthly in her previous job, commuting between Yishun and one-north by taxi and carpooling.

"There is a jam on the CTE on some mornings, but I no longer have to worry about the cost unless I'm in a taxi," she says.

On days when she is late, she carpools but travels along the inner roads to avoid the ERP. She does not take the MRT to work as the journey would involve one feeder bus, two train lines, long walks through interchanges and a cab ride — all of which is too stressful for her and her bad left knee.

"I'm kiasu and try to book my seats a week in advance. If I can't get a shuttle seat or am running late, I do feel a bit stressed," she admits.

But that is a small price to pay compared to the $500 she saves every month, which now goes to her pilgrimage fund. "It's my dream to go on a holy pilgrimage."

Mr Liew zips around campus on GrabWheels. He spends about $8 a month on a ride pass which gives him discounted rides. PHOTO: TED CHEN

I prefer... faster

The speed of life has changed at the National University of Singapore (NUS), as students zip up and down the campus pathways on green e-scooters.

For first-year Business student Xavier Liew, the change has been positive. The 23-year-old was among the first to sign up for the GrabWheels e-scooter beta programme when it was launched on Nov 19.

"It has really made commuting around campus easier and faster," he says. "Some nights, we just scoot around school for fun – it has changed campus life for me."

The part-time sales strategy executive regularly scoots from his residence in Raffles Hall to University Town, the football field, the library, supper spots, and to the Kent Ridge interchange, where he catches bus service 10 to his office in the Central Business District once a week.

Before the GrabWheels service was introduced, he got around campus either by walking or taking the university shuttle. And since the free shuttle service is the primary mode of transport for NUS students, it is usually packed during peak hours, which sometimes means another 10-minute wait for the next shuttle.

The shuttle service ends at 11pm.

A 30-minute ride on GrabWheels costs $0.50 and includes insurance coverage. Mr Liew spends about $8 a month using a ride pass which includes discounted rides.

A Grab spokesman says NUS students have scooted over 40,000km in less than a month, with usage expected to grow exponentially as the new school term begins. Trips begin and end at any of the GrabWheels parking lots at key gathering points throughout the campus.

A new Land Transport Authority regulation, which limits the speed of bicycles and personal mobility devices to 10kmh (down from the current 15kmh) on footpaths, kicks in on Friday. Whether this reduced speed limit will affect the popularity of scooting remains to be seen.

I prefer... easier

Ms P D'Cruz, 58, used to get an earful from taxi drivers when they picked her up from her condominium in Marine Parade. Due to an old-fashioned gantry design, drivers have to remove their cash card to tap on the sensor before they can enter the compound.

This simple act resulted in incessant grumbling; the $15 cab fare, an insufficient peace offering.

But all that changed when she started commuting by ride-hailing.

"The younger drivers don't fuss about having to tap their cards first to enter the compound."

The part-time sub-editor usually leaves her home at 10am. Because she travels off-peak, her ride-hailing fare is slightly cheaper, at $12.

Although her husband's car is sometimes available, she prefers not to drive to work. "I'd have to worry about parking, and there's always a jam on the PIE on the way home. I'd rather have someone drive me, especially after a long day at work."

Promptness and convenience are why Ms D'Cruz chooses this mode of commuting, even if it is costlier than other modes.

On the upcoming Thomson-East Coast MRT line, she says: "I don't see it benefiting me much. The nearest interchange in the direction of the city from Marine Terrace station is Marina Bay. Unless I have a lot of time on my hands, I'll still be relying on a car for point-to-point journeys."

Look out for the second instalment of Better Journeys next Sunday.

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BETTER EVERYDAY | Grab



Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Home Affairs Amrin Amin spraying pesticide into a juice concoction to represent the harmful chemicals that are present in innocuous-looking products during a roadshow at Bugis+ mall yesterday. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Nearly 7 in 10 youth unaware of e-cigarette dangers: HPB survey

Campaign launched to raise awareness of banned product's harmful health effects

Melissa Heng

Close to seven in 10 young people are unaware that e-cigarettes contain nicotine and cancer-causing chemicals, said a Health Promotion Board (HPB) survey, which polled 600 youth last year.

These findings were released yesterday as part of the agency's new campaign to raise awareness of the negative health effects of e-cigarettes, which were banned in 2017.

Benzene, a cancer-causing chemical found in e-cigarettes, can be found in car fuel, exhaust and detergents. Other harmful chemicals in e-cigarettes include nicotine, which is highly addictive and can affect brain development in youth; and formaldehyde, a toxic chemical found in embalming fluid.

The HPB campaign tries to educate the public that despite the attractive packaging and wide variety of flavours and scents, which make them appealing to both youth and adults, e-cigarettes, or Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (Ends), are unsafe for use.

The campaign runs until March on platforms such as social media and radio station Kiss92, and at selected institutes of higher learning.

Speaking at a roadshow at shopping mall Bugis +, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Home Affairs Amrin Amin said: "Youth who have used e-cigarettes are more likely to become regular smokers. This is what is known as the 'gateway effect', where e-cigarette users eventually transition to smoking cigarettes, or continue to use both."

Mr Amrin debunked the notion that e-cigarettes are a healthier alternative to cigarettes or can help smokers to quit.

"Don't take chances. Be familiar with the facts, don't be seduced by half-truths or lies. It's your health we are talking about. E-cigarettes are not harmless."

He said there is a worrying global trend on the use of e-cigarettes, especially among young people.

"We have to ensure that our public and young know the facts, and understand the reasons... we have banned Ends."

The campaign is the latest move by the Government to curb smoking. This is the first time that HPB has launched a campaign focused on e-cigarettes.

There has been a ban on the import and sale of electronic vaporisers, or e-vaporisers, in Singapore since 1993, when all imitation tobacco products were prohibited.

E-vaporisers, which include e-cigarettes and e-cigars, are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid (called vape juice) containing nicotine, producing a vapour that is inhaled.

In February last year, it became illegal to buy, use or possess harmful or imitation tobacco products like e-vaporisers, with offenders facing fines of up to $2,000.

A Straits Times report earlier this month said that 67 people were caught using e-vaporisers in the last 10 months since they were outlawed. Another 245 were nabbed for selling the devices in the last five years.

Passers-by at the roadshow said it was disconcerting to find out about the chemicals in e-cigarettes.

Temasek Polytechnic student Sharifah Ahmed, 18, said: "Smoking is so widespread and it's a big problem to tackle. I guess e-cigarettes seem lighter in comparison, but I didn't know they also had bad chemicals in them."

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Free safety course for cyclists extended

A free safety course launched last year for cyclists and e-scooter users is being extended to the end of this year after proving popular.

More than 25,000 people have taken part in the government-subsidised Safe Riding Programme (SRP) since it was launched last February.

The 90-minute theory and practical programme is made up of four modules – pre-journey preparation, infrastructure familiarisation, skills training and the rules and code of conduct. It also includes a training circuit which is designed to simulate scenarios when riding on paths.

Participants have come from the community, schools and corporate organisations, said the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

The extension of the subsidised course was announced by Senior Minister of State for Transport and Health Lam Pin Min at an appreciation event held yesterday to recognise the efforts of the volunteers in the Active Mobility Patrol (AMP).

Both the AMP scheme and the SRP are part of the LTA's efforts to encourage safe and harmonious sharing of paths.

Under the AMP scheme, volunteer teams conduct self-organised patrols in their own community to educate users on the rules and code of conduct under the Active Mobility Act. LTA supports the AMP teams by providing training and equipment for patrol and active mobility-related activities.

The scheme is currently run by more than 1,000 volunteers forming 62 teams islandwide – 25 per cent more volunteers than it had last July.

In his speech, Dr Lam shared how the Braddell Heights AMP team regularly organises outreach programmes to educate fellow residents on safe riding practices. "Over time, the team saw a marked improvement in how cyclists and PMD (personal mobility device) riders share paths safely with other path users in the Braddell Heights constituency."

AMP volunteers play a crucial role in encouraging pedestrians and active mobility users to share paths graciously, said Dr Lam.

"It is often the friendly words of advice and gentle reminders that leave the greatest impression and positively influence a person's behaviour."

Melissa Heng

Charity groups spread CNY cheer

Rahimah Rashith

Various charitable groups yesterday spread cheer among the less fortunate ahead of Chinese New Year.

Jamiyah Singapore and the Heartwarmers Volunteer Group distributed food items, such as rice, instant noodles, biscuits and bread, as well as a $150 hongbao each to 80 people who receive support from Jamiyah, which runs four welfare homes and eight education centres islandwide.

One of Jamiyah Singapore's three vice-presidents, Dr H.M. Saleem, said: "This event is yet another milestone for Jamiyah in promoting interfaith and interracial harmony. We look forward to work closely with the Heartwarmers Volunteer Group to reach out to the poor and needy on festive occasions like Lunar New Year."

Buddhist Heart Learning Society, a non-profit organisation, partnered Fei Yue Family Services Centre to distribute Chinese New Year gift packs containing food and necessities such as rice, instant noodles and toothpaste to 320 seniors and their families living in rental housing in Commonwealth Crescent and Holland Close.

The organisation raised close to $21,000 in cash and $1,800 in supermarket vouchers to purchase food and necessities for 320 gift packs.

In Chua Chu Kang and Yishun, community and corporate volunteers, including students from Regent Secondary School and Republic Polytechnic, as well as volunteers from Limbang Grassroots Organisations, City Developments and Keppel Group, partnered North West Community Development Council to distribute festive packs and household items such as fans and mattresses.

They were also involved in home improvement activities such as spring cleaning.

The annual flagship event, We-Care @ North West – Service Weeks, is a three-week programme that began on Jan 12 and is aimed at helping 20,000 people living in 6,500 rental units.

Mr K. Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Law and an MP for Nee Soon GRC, said: "WeCare @ North West – Service Weeks is a good platform. It brings schools, partners and volunteers together to help the community."

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Guest of honour Mohamed Abdullah Alhabshee, President Halimah Yacob's husband, presenting food items to a Jamiyah Singapore beneficiary at the event yesterday. He is flanked by the president of Jamiyah Singapore, Dr Mohd Hasbi Abu Bakar (far left), and one of its vice-presidents, Dr H.M. Saleem. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY

This event is yet another milestone for Jamiyah in promoting interfaith and interracial harmony.

DR H.M. SALEEM, one of Jamiyah Singapore's three vice-presidents.

Go for gourmet trips, see gorillas, says ST journalist

She shares these and her other top 10 travel experiences for 2019 at library talk

Desiree Loh



Straits Times travel writer Lee Siew Hua and guest speaker Chang Theng Hwee, chief executive of luxury travel operator Scott Dunn Asia, at the Central Public Library last Friday. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Gourmet hiking trips in Provence, France, getting up close to mountain gorillas in Rwanda and Uganda, and trekking in Slovenia's Julian Alps should be among travellers' plans this year.

These were among the travel experiences highlighted by Straits Times travel writer Lee Siew Hua and her guest speaker, Mr Chang Theng Hwee, the chief executive of luxury travel operator Scott Dunn Asia, at a talk on the best travel experiences for this year at the Central Public Library last Friday.

The talk, attended by about 300 people, was organised by The Straits Times and National Library Board (NLB) as part of the askST@NLB series.

During the 1½-hour session, Ms Lee also described her travels to Antarctica, Seattle in the United States, and gourmet hiking in Provence, all of which are on the speakers' top 10 list of travel experiences for this year.

She said: "There's the sumptuous, sunlit face of Provence and also the face of adventure. There's the pleasure of sipping rose wine and dining in Michelin-starred restaurants, and there is also hiking past the jagged mountains where the Tour De France bicycle race goes through."

Mr Chang talked about alternative ways to experience different destinations.

Alaska, for example, may be known for its cruise holidays but travellers should visit fishing lodges rather than hop on a jam-packed cruise and watch a cabaret show, he said.

He added: "If you go during the correct season and they're fishing for salmon at the lodges, that's where the grizzly bears will be. Some of our guests have brought back pictures with more than 10 grizzly bears."

The best part, said Mr Chang, is that these lodges allow a maximum of only 30 guests, so travellers do not have to jostle to see the grizzly bears. He said: "If you go to a place like Yellowstone National Park, it'll be 30 vehicles of tourists to one bear."

Ms Veron Ng, 25, who recently graduated from university and is looking for a job, said she found the talk insightful.

She said: "I was a tourism student in polytechnic and I wanted to find out about what's trending in the travel industry.

"Luxury travel is very different and I found out more about the exotic places that people travel to."

She added that she liked the informal and candid format of the talk.

The talk was streamed on the Rings.TV application and attracted 766 views.

The live streaming video can be replayed via the app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

The next askST@NLB session will be on Feb 15, when Ms Lee and Mr Richard Launder, chief executive of destination management company Destination America, will talk about what is trending for travel in the US and beyond. Registration is at str.sg/askSiewHua3

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Ex-civilian officer from police force jailed

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A civilian officer attached to Clementi Police Division headquarters accessed a computer system at his workplace and made an unauthorised change to his records to show that he was permanently exempted from performing the Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT).

Labin Ismail, *27,* who served his national service in the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and resigned from his civilian post last July, was yesterday sentenced to two weeks' jail. He pleaded guilty on Jan 17 to an offence under the Computer Misuse and Cyber-security Act.

The court heard that he had also made a similar unauthorised change to the records of another man without his knowledge.

Labin told the court that he did so as the man had suicidal tendencies.

Labin's second charge under the same Act involving the man was considered during sentencing.

Labin, who joined SPF in 2013 as a civilian officer, was given access to the National Service Personnel Administration and Management (NSPAM) system as part of his job.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Ryan Lim told the court that the NSPAM is a platform used to access and maintain records of national servicemen under the SPF.

The DPP added that Labin was authorised to use the system for attendance taking and tracking overseas notifications, among other tasks.

He later discovered that he was able to amend an individual's IPPT status in the system, but he knew he was not authorised to exempt national servicemen from the test.

DPP Lim said: "On Jan 9, 2015, the accused amended his own IPPT status in NSPAM. He accessed his own records, and modified those records by ticking the checkbox for 'IPPT Excused', and adding the words 'Excused IPPT' in the remarks text box.

"His NSPAM record thus showed that he was exempted from IPPT permanently."

He made a similar change to the other man's records in March 2016.

The DPP said Labin's offences were discovered only in January last year when the man told the authorities that he was unable to book his IPPT.

Internal investigations revealed that Labin had made the unauthorised changes.

Yesterday, District Judge Marvin Bay said: "The offence was thus committed against a public institution by the very person entrusted with the maintenance of these records."

Responding to queries from The Sunday Times, police said SPF personnel, including civilian officers, are expected to uphold the law and maintain the highest standards of conduct and integrity.

The police spokesman added: "We will deal severely with officers who break the law, including charging them in court."

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Festive fun for Kampong Glam residents



Mr Wee Ee Cheong, deputy chairman and chief executive of the United Overseas Bank (UOB), and Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of the Central Singapore District, giving out sculpted balloons to children residing in Kampong Glam.

UOB and the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) on Friday treated more than 150 families and seniors residing in the Kampong Glam area to a carnival and a reunion dinner by celebrity chef Eric Teo at the Pan Pacific Hotel.

More than 120 client and employee volunteers played host to the residents for the evening. The children also got to try their hand at traditional games.

UOB's annual Chinese New Year outreach programme will culminate with its flagship fund-raising dinner on Feb 12, when funds will be raised through the auction of a specially commissioned piece of art and through donations made by the bank's clients and employees.

In addition to The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, which benefits about 10,000 children from low-income families every year, other beneficiaries will include the Central Singapore CDC, The Business Times Budding Artists Fund and The Red Pencil Singapore.

PHOTO: UNITED OVERSEAS BANK

New State Courts Towers on track for 2020 opening

35-storey project is tallest govt building here

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

At 178m, the new State Courts Towers stands out among its neighbours in Chinatown and is now the tallest government building in Singapore.

A ceremony, officiated by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, was held on Friday to mark the completion of structural works for the 35-storey building, which comprises two interconnected towers.

During the event, a drone was launched to place the symbolic final portion of concrete to "top out" the structure.

The building is on schedule to be fully operational by the first quarter of next year.

The $450 million project, which started in 2014, will now shift to the final phase of construction of the interior of the two towers.

One tower will be fitted out with 53 courtrooms and the same number of hearing chambers to operate as the Court Tower, said Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice See Kee Oon. This is an increase from the 37 courtrooms and 40 chambers in the existing nine-storey State Courts building.

"These courtrooms and chambers will be equipped with the necessary facilities and technology that will allow us to deliver justice in a timely and efficient manner and to meet the demands of an IT-connected community," added Justice See.

In the pipeline are a resource management system that can deploy court interpreters in real time according to their language and dialect proficiency, as well as a system that transcribes court proceedings instantly and allows parties to access the transcripts on computer screens.

The Court Tower will be connected to the Office Tower by 39 link bridges.

Energy-saving technology, including solar panels and rain water harvesting, has also been incorporated into the design of the towers.

In 2011, expansion plans for the current octagonal-shaped courthouse were mapped out as the caseload and the functions of the State Courts rose over the years.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the State Courts Towers took place in May 2014 and construction of the superstructure – the part that is above ground level – began in March 2017.

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The $450 million development comprises two towers connected by 39 link bridges. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

WELL-EQUIPPED COURTROOMS

These courtrooms and chambers will be equipped with the necessary facilities and technology that will allow us to deliver justice in a timely and efficient manner and to meet the demands of an IT-connected community.

JUSTICE SEE KEE OON



Money mule jailed for four years, 10 months

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A money mule for an international syndicate, linked to a cheating case involving more than $5 million, came to Singapore twice in 2017 to collect over $1 million of the cash.

Looi Yu Chong then returned to his native Malaysia but was brought back here after Malaysian police arrested him on Jan 16 last year.

On Friday, District Judge Victor Yeo said the level of harm in Looi's case was "severe" and sentenced the 21-year-old to four years and 10 months' jail.

Looi pleaded guilty on Thursday to one count of dealing with the benefits of criminal activities totalling more than $655,000. A second similar charge involving $500,000 was considered during sentencing.

Others connected to the syndicate took the remaining sum of almost $4 million. Court documents did not reveal their identities.

On Nov 7, 2017, a 58-year-old Singaporean retiree received a phone call from someone purportedly from "Chinatown police station" who told her she was a suspect in a criminal case. She was later told that the investigation would last seven days and that she would eventually be given documents to sign stating she was "not guilty".

Pretending to be a police officer, a syndicate member told her to give him the details of her bank accounts and she complied. On 11 occasions, he told her to make withdrawals and deliver the cash to different people purportedly from the Chinese government.

He told her that by handing over the money, she would be assisting the police in a money laundering probe. The retiree complied out of fear and handed cash totalling over $5 million to an unknown man and a Singaporean woman, who was also duped by the syndicate.

The woman, a 58-year-old sales promoter, was told she too was suspected of being involved in criminal activities. Syndicate members told her that to assist in investigations, she had to collect cash from strangers and deliver it to others.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Suhas Malhotra said Looi received more than $1 million of the retiree's money from the sales promoter in Singapore on Nov 16 and 17, 2017. Looi received RM1,500 (S$490) for his role as a money mule.

DPP Malhotra urged Judge Yeo to sentence Looi to 5½ years' jail. Defence lawyer John Koh pleaded for his client to be sentenced to between 45 and 49 months' jail. He said Looi was a "mere foot soldier" and was only 20 when he committed the offence. Looi has not made any restitution.

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NUS prof to head HK law school



Professor Tan Cheng Han (left) will be dean of the City University of Hong Kong School of Law from Sept 1. His current post at NUS will be filled by Professor Hans Tjio.

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

National University of Singapore (NUS) law professor Tan Cheng Han will be leaving his role later this year to become the dean of a law school in Hong Kong.

His current post will be filled by Professor Hans Tjio.

The City University of Hong Kong confirmed 53-year-old Professor Tan's appointment to The Sunday Times, while the NUS Law Faculty said that Prof Tjio will take over his role as the new director of the EW Barker Centre for Law and Business with effect from July.

"I'm excited to see Professor Tjio take the helm of the EW Barker Centre and build on the many successes of its inaugural director, Professor Tan Cheng Han, who has done an extraordinary job in leading the centre since its founding," said Professor Simon Chesterman, dean of NUS law.

"Hans Tjio has established himself as Singapore's leading securities regulation scholar, while also maintaining a strong record of engagement with industry and regulators."

The centre was established to promote research and educational opportunities for faculty, students, legal practitioners and business executives who share a common interest in law, business and economics. It is continually expanding its initiatives, aided by a philanthropic gift totalling $21 million.

Prof Tjio, 53, who has taught at NUS law since 1990, was previously co-director of the Centre for Banking and Finance Law, director of the Centre for Commercial Law Studies at NUS law and a consultant with Linklaters Singapore.

Among other things, he presently serves on the Securities Industry Council and his work has also been published widely in international and local journals and books.

Prof Tjio said he intends "to continue the inter-disciplinary approach to law and business set by Professor Tan" and also to "deepen our research into small, medium enterprises which are vital to the real economy in terms of diversity and employment", among other things.

NUS law said Prof Tan was instrumental in establishing the EW Barker Centre for Law and Business as one of the world's leading commercial law research centres, adding that he also made a tremendous impact on legal education through his teaching, research and leadership as dean of NUS law from 2001 to 2011.

Prof Tan served as a consultant for TSMP Law Corp for a decade while still teaching at NUS. Its joint managing partner Stefanie Yuen Thio said: "Cheng Han is a top legal brain, who is also blessed with sound commercial nous and the ability to communicate complex concepts clearly.

"As dean of NUS Law Faculty, Cheng Han was instrumental in putting the law school on the international academic map, where we are currently ranked 15th in the world.

"Cheng Han's deanship at Hong Kong's City University's law faculty is a testament to his international reputation. I know this is only one more stepping stone in his stellar career. He will fly the Singapore flag high."

Prof Tan will assume duty as chair professor of commercial law in the City University of Hong Kong School of Law on July 2 and concurrently serve as dean of the school from Sept 1.

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Barisan romps to by-election win in Cameron Highlands


Victorious BN candidate Ramli Mohd Nor (second from right), who is poised to become Malaysia's first Orang Asli MP, with Umno acting president Mohamad Hasan (centre), after winning the Cameron Highlands polls yesterday. For the BN coalition, which is led by Umno, the win – its first in five by-elections – is a big morale booster. PHOTO: BERNAMA

BN keeps seat with 3,000-vote margin against Pakatan as country gets its first Orang Asli MP

Shannon Teoh
Malaysia Bureau Chief
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's opposition coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) scored a crushing victory in Cameron Highlands yesterday against the ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) alliance in a closely watched by-election.

Barisan retained the parliamentary seat in Pahang state with a 3,238-vote majority, official results show, compared with a margin of victory of just several hundred votes in the last two general elections in 2013 and last year.

The win by the Barisan coalition – which is led by Umno – is a big morale booster as this is its first victory in five by-elections – and one with the highest turnout– since being toppled from power in last May's general election.

Retired senior policeman Ramli Mohd Nor, 61, is the first MP to come from the indigenous Orang Asli community. He got 12,038 votes against PH candidate Manogaran Marimuthu's 8,800 votes.

About 70 per cent of the 32,000 eligible voters cast their votes. However, not enough voters who work outside the rural Pahang constituency returned to swing the tide against Barisan, as PH had hoped. BN's win was a sign of deep support from the Malays and Orang Asli tribesmen.

Opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) stayed out of the fray and threw its weight behind the BN candidate instead. The big vote margin is the strongest indication yet that their pact to support each other on Malay-Muslim issues is a formidable strategy in the hinterland.

Singapore Institute of International Affairs senior fellow Oh Ei Sun said: "Umno remains overwhelmingly strong in rural constituencies, and if their electoral pact with PAS to run only one candidate holds, they remain a force in these areas."

The loss is a blow to Pakatan, which in November won a court decision that declared BN's 567-vote victory in Cameron Highlands last year unfair because of bribery.

Pakatan's failure to overturn that narrow margin backs recent opinion surveys, which have found lower approval for the government eight months in, compared with the period when Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's administration first came to power.

"The outcome shows that the government is still seen as the government of urban Malaysia," said Bower Group Asia director Adib Zalkapli.

Though this was the fifth by-election since Tun Dr Mahathir returned to power, it was the first real bellwether for the government. The first three were for state assembly seats in Selangor, which were won handsomely by PH last May.

The fourth was the forced vote in Port Dickson to allow PH leader Anwar Ibrahim to return to Parliament after receiving a royal pardon for a controversial sodomy conviction.

For Barisan, the victory in the highlands is a much-needed fillip. BN has been in a shambles since losing power, with only three out of 13 parties still in the coalition. It also continues to be stung by exposes of billion-ringgit scandals from when it was in power.

Former premier Najib Razak cannily chose Cameron Highlands, located in his home state of Pahang, to return to prominence, campaigning heavily on the ground and social media.

The BN victory will give him belief that despite being swiftly forced to resign the Umno presidency soon after losing power, his political career is far from over.

But with his corruption trial due to start on Feb 12, Mr Adib said he believes the by-election win "is a temporary respite" for Najib.

Mr Ramli, who was born in Pahang, rose through the ranks and retired as Assistant Commissioner of Police after 34 years of service.

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A billboard featuring Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link project in Kota Sultan Ahmad Shah, Kuantan. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

China-backed rail project axed by KL over high costs

KUALA LUMPUR • Malaysia's economics minister yesterday said the country will cancel the US$20 billion (S$27 billion) East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project with contractor China Communications Construction Co (CCCC).

Datuk Seri Azmin Ali said at a media event that the cost of the project was too great, while giving an assurance that Malaysia would welcome all forms of investment from China on a case-by-case basis.

"The Cabinet has made this decision because the cost to develop the ECRL is too big and we don't have (the) financial capacity," said Mr Azmin.

The government was still determining how much to pay CCCC as the project cancellation fee, he said.

The interest on the project alone amounted to RM500 million (S$164 million) a year.

"We cannot afford to bear this, so this project needs to be terminated without affecting our good relationship with China."

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said last August that the rail project would be cancelled "for now", but the government has since said it was in negotiations with CCCC on the rail line's future.

Tun Dr Mahathir also announced in August the cancellation of another China-backed project, a natural gas pipeline in the East Malaysia state of Sabah.

CCCC did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

Since coming to power last May, Dr Mahathir has repeatedly vowed to renegotiate or cancel what he calls "unfair" Chinese infrastructure deals authorised by his predecessor Najib Razak, whose near-decade-long rule ended in electoral defeat amid a massive financial scandal.

The ECRL project was the centrepiece of China's infrastructure push in Malaysia but work had been suspended pending discussions over pricing and amid graft accusations.

Malaysian Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng said last year that the cost of the ECRL project had been inflated, according to local financial newspaper The Edge.

The ECRL project is one of the biggest deals China has signed under its signature Belt and Road Initiative, as well as one of state-owned contractor CCCC's largest railway projects.

In November, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission issued a report ranking the ECRL as the second-largest Belt and Road project by estimated cost, behind the US$21.4 billion Moscow-Kazan high-speed railway project in Russia. REUTERS



Ahok confirms he and 21-year-old girlfriend to wed

Former cop Puput has been a fixture at ex-Jakarta governor's side since his release

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

A wedding is indeed on the cards for former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama.

Rumours about his impending marriage to his ex-wife's former aide had been making the rounds weeks before his release from prison on Thursday.

But the first confirmation from Mr Basuki himself came in videos that have swiftly gone viral since they were uploaded on YouTube on Friday night.

In the clips of his meeting with Hanura party chairman Oesman Sapta Odang, the former governor was asked whether the rumours about an upcoming second marriage were true.

He replied: "Yes, because my mother said 'Hok, I can't take care or live with you any longer. I'm already in my 70s'... She also said 'Your wife should be my replacement to cook, make cakes and take care of you. That last one didn't want to.'"

Mr Basuki, popularly known as Ahok, divorced his former wife of more than 20 years, Madam Veronica Tan, last year. Details about her affair with married businessman Julianto Tio were revealed in court during divorce proceedings.

In the clips, Mr Basuki, 52, added that his mother advised him to get married soon, before he turned 55.

He confirmed that his future wife is former policewoman Puput Nastiti Devi, 21, who has been a fixture at his side since his release from prison.

His mother, he said, has been healthier since his relationship with his new girlfriend began.

Ms Puput, who is also seen in the video clips, said: "She knows there's somebody to take care of her son. She trusts me."

Local media reported that marriage forms have been submitted for the wedding, and some of Mr Basuki's close friends and allies have said a marriage was impending.

But, responding to the widespread reports, Mr Basuki's sister and lawyer said his family was unaware of any wedding plans.

Mr Basuki told Mr Oesman that Ms Puput had long helped his mother with cooking, and also shed some light on how they first met.

Ms Puput became a familiar sight after full police protection was ordered for the former governor's family following an anti-Ahok rally in Jakarta in 2016, which saw thousands of Muslim hardliners – who believed he had insulted the Quran – take to the streets.

"It's a funny story," he said, adding: "I never thought I would date a female police officer."

Ms Puput resigned from the police force on Jan 9.

The candid conversation between Mr Basuki, Mr Oesman and Ms Puput also saw them discussing terms of endearment – Ms Puput calls her future husband "yeobo" (honey in Korean) – and even palm lines.

"One of my friends told me I should marry somebody with the same lines on the palms of our hands," said Mr Basuki, inviting Ms Puput to compare the lines of her palms with his.

Mr Oesman said: "They really are a match."

While speculation over his personal life may have been put to rest after the YouTube videos, many are also still curious to know more about Mr Basuki's future plans.

But those looking forward to the former governor's first media interview since his release, which was initially set for yesterday evening, will have to wait a while more.

Hours before the scheduled interview, Metro TV said Mr Basuki's side had requested a cancellation "due to his busy schedule". A spokesman for the station said the interview would be rescheduled, but gave no date.

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NEW WOMAN TO CARE FOR AHOK

Yes, because my mother said 'Hok, I can't take care or live with you any longer. I'm already in my 70s'... She also said 'Your wife should be my replacement to cook, make cakes and take care of you.'

MR BASUKI TJAHAJA PURNAMA, former Jakarta governor popularly known as Ahok, when asked if the rumours about an upcoming second marriage were true. He has confirmed that his future wife is former policewoman Puput Nastiti Devi, 21.



Former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (left), with his girlfriend Puput Nastiti Devi seated next to him, at a thanksgiving service after being released from prison on Thursday in this photo taken by Antara Foto. PHOTO: REUTERS



Ms Devianti Faridz (above), the announcer for Indonesia's first MRT system, says she was inspired by Ms Juanita Melson (below), who made the original announcements for Singapore's rail system. PHOTOS: IKHWAN YANUAR, FLORENCE TAN HUI KUN

MRT Jakarta's unexpected Singapore connection

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta



Indonesia's first mass rapid transit (MRT) system – slated to open fully to the public in March in a city notorious for its traffic jams – has an unexpected Singapore connection.

The voice of Jakarta's long-awaited MRT network will belong to a Singapore permanent resident who was inspired by radio veteran Juanita Melson, the woman behind the original announcements for Singapore's own rail system.

Freelance journalist Devianti Faridz's first brush with Ms Melson came during her maiden visit to Singapore in 1997. "I was on the MRT and I heard this wonderful voice. I was just so impressed by it," she told The Sunday Times.

"I didn't know who she was then but her voice was so warm, so calming. It was so well-rounded, and I just loved listening to her announcements every time I went back to Singapore."

Ms Melson, who worked as a disc jockey and later as a programme manager for radio station Rediffusion, voiced the SMRT train and station announcements between 1996 and 2008.

She died in her sleep at the age of 72 in 2017 after a battle with cancer.

Through the decades, her voice has stuck with Ms Devianti, who last year watched an interview with Ms Melson on YouTube.

"She voiced some announcements and I was like, 'Yes, this is the voice I'm familiar with, the one I fell in love with when I first took the SMRT'," said the 42-year-old, who has more than two decades of experience in broadcast journalism and has worked at ChannelNewsAsia and at Indonesia's MetroTV.

"So what I'm doing now is sort of a tribute to her because she's the voice that I refer to. I was inspired by her."

It was after a train ride in Singapore in the middle of last year that Ms Devianti decided to send a recording of her own voice making a train announcement to MRT Jakarta.

"I was sitting there in the MRT train and I thought, 'Wow, wouldn't it be great if I were to be the announcer for Jakarta's first MRT?' It was just a crazy idea," recalled Ms Devianti, who was born in Bandung and now lives in Jakarta.

"But it was worth the try. If I don't get it, that's OK. But if I did... wow, I would consider that one of my legacies to my hometown Jakarta."

She was placed in a pool of candidates vying for the role and last November, she heard that the job was hers. "I got to this point by sheer will," said Ms Devianti. "If I hadn't had that idea, if I hadn't just tried, I wouldn't even be in the running."

Her first recording session on Thursday, voicing station and train announcements in English and Bahasa Indonesia, was a three-hour exercise in precision.

She and a team from MRT Jakarta worked through intonations, and made tweaks along the way to the wording and translations of announcements.

In her meetings with MRT Jakarta officials, Ms Devianti also brought up some things she had noticed while travelling on Singapore's rail system and hoped to see emulated, such as the graciousness campaign and videos on what to do in the event of a terrorist attack.

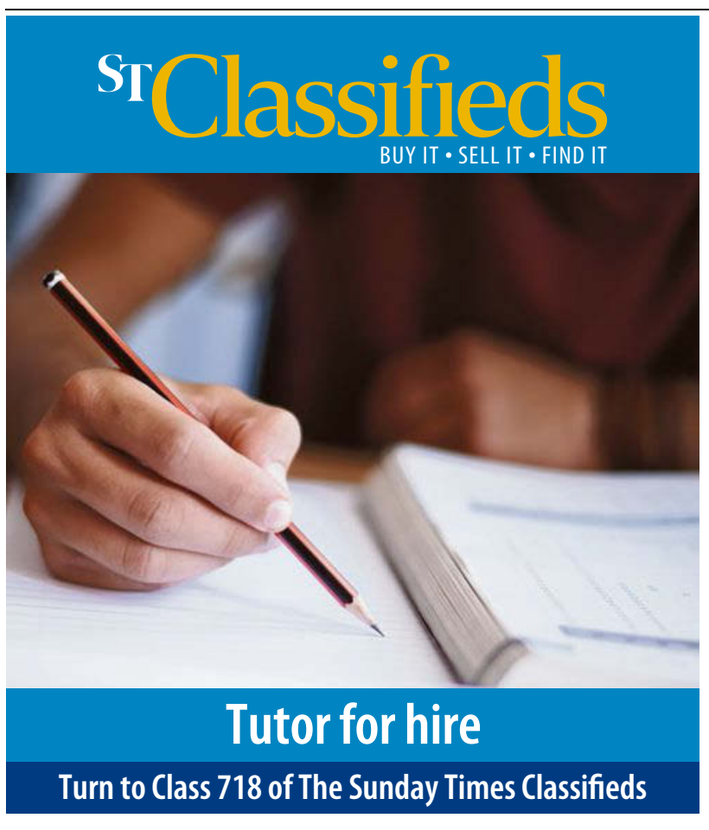
She will be taking her father along on one of the first trains when the Jakarta rail system launches its trial run for select commuters at the end of next month.

"I'm really ecstatic to have this chance to work with MRT Jakarta," said Ms Devianti, whose husband is Singaporean.

"I've always looked up to and admired SMRT and how it gets people to places fast, and I referred to it when I was preparing.

"I really believe in MRT Jakarta. It will help people get around the city faster, and people are highly anticipating its launch."

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‘Invasion Day’ protests draw thousands

Call to rethink Australia Day celebration as it’s seen as disrespectful to indigenous people

MELBOURNE • Thousands of Australians attended “Invasion Day” rallies across the country yesterday calling for a rethink of national day celebrations they say are disrespectful to indigenous people.

The annual Jan 26 Australia Day holiday commemorates the arrival of the first British settlers in 1788, but for many Australians it marks the beginning of colonial oppression of Aboriginal people.

Several thousands joined the annual march in Melbourne yesterday chanting “Always was, always will be Aboriginal land”, and holding placards stating “Australia is a crime scene”. Thousands more joined similar rallies in major cities, calling for a change of date, or for the day to be abolished altogether.

“Why would you want to celebrate this concept called Australia? It is founded on lies, founded on genocide, founded on murder,” Melbourne protester Dominic Guerrera told Agence France-Presse. “There’s nothing to celebrate in that.”

Divisions have deepened in recent years with increasing calls to change the date.

Amid the heightened sensitivities, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced government funding of a voyage to mark the 250th anniversary of explorer Captain James Cook’s first journey to Australia.

Canberra pledged about US$6.5 million (S$8.8 million) to a circumnavigation of Australia in a replica of Cook’s ship, the Endeavour, which in 1770 brought the British into contact with eastern Australia and foreshadowed the colonisation of the continent.

The story of Cook’s voyage and his “discovery” of territory declared as New South Wales have stirred debate in Australia, with Aboriginal people inhabiting the land for more than 60,000 years before the first European explorers arrived.

Meanwhile, the uncovering last week in London of the remains of British explorer Matthew Flinders, who is credited as the first to circumnavigate the Australian continent in 1802-03, has also added to the controversy. An Aboriginal aide to Flinders named Bungaree has been largely eclipsed by his British captain, but historians now believe he played a crucial role in the success of the voyage.

Mr Morrison, who has resisted calls to change the date, yesterday said Australia cannot “walk away” from its past.

He told reporters that all must “be able to see the better nature of Australians and the values we hold together, all races, all peoples, all cultures, all religions, all languages even”.

Mr Morrison also said it is idealism and enlightenment, not cruelty and dispossession, that have prevailed in the country.

“These great ideas are the foundation of our modern Australia, and they have transformed us into this most recent chapter of our great story – the one we write together,” he said.

Aboriginal people remain the most disadvantaged Australians, with higher rates of poverty, ill-health and imprisonment than any other community.

Australia Day is also celebrated across the country, with picnics, traditional Aboriginal performances and citizenship ceremonies, where more than 16,000 new Australians pledged their commitment to the nation yesterday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS



Protesters shouting slogans while marching through the streets of Sydney yesterday at an “Invasion Day” rally. Thousands joined rallies across Australia calling for an end to the celebration of Australia Day on Jan 26, which marks the declaration of British sovereignty on the land that eventually became Australia. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Thai cave rescue duo named Australians of the Year

SYDNEY • Two Australian cave divers who helped rescue 12 boys stuck deep in a Thai cave in July last year yesterday said children should get cuts, bruises and broken arms as they explore the world.

Adelaide anaesthetist Richard “Harry” Harris and retired vet Craig Challen, who were made dual “Australians of the Year” on Friday evening before yesterday’s Australia Day, said despite the young Thai soccer players getting stuck in the cave, it was important for kids to be out exploring the world.

On national ABC radio yesterday morning, Dr Harris said he would spend his year as co-Australian of the Year urging children to put down video games, tear away from TV screens, get outdoors, escape so-called “helicopter parents”, and go exploring.

“It’s important for kids to explore and challenge themselves, get a few grazed knees, stub a few toes, break a few arms or legs,” said Dr Harris.

“Exploring and physical challenges make us more robust and confident, and we all need that as we head into life.”

Dr Challen said what they did in the cave rescue was a metaphor for the importance of taking chances that life presented.

The pair were about to go on a caving holiday in central Australia in July when they got a call asking for their help in the Thai cave rescue.

DPA



China upbeat over pace of economic growth: Li

It has enough resilience, potential, ample room for growth: Premier

SHANGHAI • China is fully confident that it is capable of keeping its economic growth rate within an appropriate range this year in spite of challenges, state news agency Xinhua reported Chinese Premier Li Keqiang as saying.

"China's economy has enough resilience, potential and ample room for growth, especially with a huge domestic market and rich human resources of nearly 1.4 billion people," Mr Li said at a discussion on Friday with some foreign experts working in China.

"Therefore, we are fully confident and capable of keeping economic growth rate within an appropriate range in spite of multiple risks and challenges this year," he added.

The world's second-largest economy grew 6.6 per cent last year, above the official target of around 6.5 per cent, according to data issued by the National Bureau of Statistics on Monday.

"The growth rate of 6.6 per cent is hard-won, as it is on the basis of China's very high economic output, fairly sufficient employment and continuous improvement of the environment," said Mr Li.

It was, however, the slowest annual pace since 1990, amid pressure from faltering domestic demand and bruising US tariffs.

Economists polled by Reuters expect the Chinese economy to cool further this year to 6.3 per cent as those pressures continue.

Mr Li said China will forge ahead with reforms.

He said China will strengthen regulation, provide better services, reduce taxes and fees on a larger scale, further ease market access and provide a business environment of fair competition.

China is committed to opening wider to the outside world and learning advanced technology and experience from foreign countries, Mr Li added.

He said China, as a developing country, will stick to inclusive development. "China welcomes the entry of all competitive commodities and technology in the world, and we will strictly protect intellectual property rights and speed up the market transformation of innovation results," he added.

Meanwhile, China has appointed banking veteran Yi Huiman to head the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), putting governance of the nation's stock markets in his hands at a time when investor confidence has been hit by a slowing economy and US tariffs.

Mr Yi, 54, currently chairman of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), will take over from Mr Liu Shiyu as CSRC party secretary and chairman.

Mr Yi faces the challenge of reviving global and domestic investor interest in Chinese equities, which have lost a quarter of their value from a year ago amid slowing economic growth and friction between Beijing and Washington over trade issues. REUTERS, XINHUA

Casino empire fight: Stanley Ho's eldest daughter gains upper hand

HONG KONG • A new alliance has emerged among some of billionaire Stanley Ho's 17 children in the decade-long battle for his Macau casino empire, and eldest daughter Pansy looks the likely victor.

Ms Ho announced that she had joined up with some siblings and the Henry Fok Foundation and would hold a combined 53 per cent in Sociedade de Turismo e Diversoes de Macau (STDM), which controls casino operator SJM Holdings.

The alliance gives her the upper hand over Ms Angela Leong, the fourth wife of 97-year-old Ho, and her main rival in the battle for control of Macau's original gaming company. Ms Leong holds 8 per cent of SJM.

The news of the alliance helped send shares in SJM up more than 8 per cent last Thursday, while Shun Tak Holdings – Ms Ho's property to transport conglomerate – rose 6 per cent, as investors expected more stability in SJM's ownership.

The move comes ahead of the expiration of casino licences in the world's biggest gambling hub of Macau, where SJM and MGM's licences are set to expire next year.

The concessionaires, which also include Wynn Macau, Sands Macau, Galaxy Entertainment and Melco Resorts, do not have clarity yet on what happens when their licences expire, starting next year.

Macau is the only place in China where casinos are allowed.

Born into a family that developed a flourishing gambling culture in the southern Chinese territory more than 50 years ago, Ms Ho is spearheading a move to ensure stability, aiming to extend SJM's gaming concession and maintain STDM as the majority owner of SJM. BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

KEY PLAYERS TO WATCH

Here are four people to watch as the family saga over control of the nearly US$6 billion (S$8.12 billion) business continues.



PANSY HO

Born in 1962 to Mr Stanley Ho and his second wife Lucina Laam King-ying, Ms Ho studied marketing and business at Santa Clara University in California before pursuing a brief TV acting career in Hong Kong.

She ended up running Shun Tak Holdings, which operates ferry and helicopter services linking Hong Kong and Macau. She was appointed managing director of Shun Tak during Macau's handover from Portugal to China in 1999, and became chairman after her father stepped down in 2017. She helped form MGM China in a joint venture with billionaire Kirk Kerkorian's MGM Resorts.



ANGELA LEONG

Billionaire Leong is co-chairman of SJM Holdings, one of six firms authorised to operate casinos in Macau, and is an STDM director. SJM has 20 casinos, about 1,700 gaming tables and over 2,400 slot machines.

She was born into a wealthy military family in Guangzhou in 1961. She met the tycoon in 1986, and backed by him, built a sprawling property business. She also became a member of the Legislative Council of Macau.



LAWRENCE HO

The tycoon's son with Ms Laam worked at Citibank and Jardine Fleming after returning to Hong Kong from studies at the University of Toronto.

Despite being quoted as saying he does not like gambling, he joined the family business. In 2006, he became chairman and chief executive officer of Melco International Development, a Hong Kong-listed entertainment group, which includes Nasdaq-listed Melco Resorts & Entertainment. He ended a partnership with Australian billionaire James Packer after working on four casinos together.



DAISY HO

After obtaining a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Southern California and a master's of business administration degree in finance at the University of Toronto, she became chairman and executive director of SJM Holdings. She is also Shun Tak Holdings' chief financial officer. She has been a committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Tianjin since 2008. BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

Jilin blasts caused by cancer sufferer: Police

Lim Yan Liang
China Correspondent
In Beijing

The string of explosions that rocked the city of Changchun in China's north-eastern Jilin province on Friday afternoon was caused by a 56-year-old cancer sufferer who was "pessimistic with life", according to the city's municipal public security bureau.

The authorities said the blasts were set off by a man from Jiangsu called Guo Moutao, after he murdered another man in a money-related dispute in the nearby city of Songyuan.

Guo was killed by one of the explosions and another person was injured.

"Investigations showed that the suspect, Guo Moutao, was suffering from cancer and pessimistic with life," Changchun authorities said in a statement carried by Xinhua news agency.

"After killing a man he had an economic dispute with in Songyuan city, he drove to Changchun city at noon on Jan 25 and detonated a car that was parked in the underground carpark of Wanda Plaza."

The underground explosion was followed by at least 17 other blasts at the condominium-cum-shopping mall, and eyewitness footage on China's Twitter-like service Weibo showed explosives being lobbed out of the window of an apartment on the 30th floor.

The videos were later taken down from the platform.

City officials said that following the blasts a taskforce of more than 200 elite police officers from the provincial, municipal, and district levels was organised to investigate the explosions.

"By extracting DNA from the unexploded ordnance left at the scene, comprehensive on-site investigations and cross-references with extracted video surveillance, it was concluded that the man who died on-site, Guo Moutao, was the suspect in this case," said the Changchun Municipal Public Security Bureau.

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Broken windows of Wanda Plaza after an explosion in Changchun city, Jilin province, on Friday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sharing cosmetics in China: Pretty unhygienic?





Chinese customer Fu Jie, 28, trying out make-up in a "shareable make-up" pod operated by 17Beauty, or Seventeen Beauty, at a mall in Beijing.

Such pods are the latest fad to enter China's large sharing economy, aimed at young urban women on the go. Chinese start-up 17Beauty currently operates about 50 such booths in four cities – Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan and Guangzhou, with nine pods in the capital city itself.

The booths are located in shopping malls, office buildings and transportation hubs. Customers have to scan a QR code to enter the booth, which usually features a dressing table, chair, mirror and cosmetics and beauty products of local and international brands. It costs 28 yuan (S$5.70) per 15 minutes for customers to use the booth. Local cosmetics companies pay 1,500 yuan a month to have their products featured in the pod.

Customers also have the option to buy the products online by scanning a QR code if they like what they have tried out. The "shareable make-up" pods have sparked discussions on hygiene issues in sharing make-up with strangers, though some customers view it as a convenient way to freshen up before rushing to important meetings. PHOTOS: EPA-EFE

Chinese boy's heartfelt appeal to phone-addict father moves netizens

ZHENGZHOU • A nine-year-old boy in central China tugged at the heartstrings of many when his cry for attention from his phone-addict father in a school essay went viral on social media.

The essay was posted on Jan 17 on China's microblogging platform Weibo by his teacher at Luoyang International School in Henan province's Luoyang city, Dahe Daily reported.

In the essay titled "Father, I want to tell you this", the child, who was referred to as Xiaozhi by Chinese media, described how his father was glued to his mobile phone "day and night and every day" as though he could not live without it.

"Father, every time I ask you to check my homework, you would just take one look and say 'Not bad, now go play'," the boy wrote. "Otherwise you would just give me a phone so I could play too."

He even likened his father to "a vicious wolf that has starved for three days and three nights, eyeing that big chunk of fat meat".

"It's also as though there is a vacuum cleaner inside the cellphone sucking him in... " he wrote.

"Father, what I want is not a house full of tidbits, the most high-end cellphone, and certainly not ultra high-end toys," he continued.

"What I want is only for you to put down your phone and play with me. That'll be the happiest thing to happen to me in my whole life.

"Father, as long as you put down the phone, I'm willing to trade my life for it. I love you, my father."

The boy's teacher, who gave only her surname Zhao, said Xiaozhi is an all-rounder in school and a long-distance running champion in class. She was so moved by the child's innocent wish and literary talent that she awarded him full marks for the essay which he wrote for his year-end examination.

The essay has proved to be a turning point in the father-son relationship. In an interview with Dahe Daily, Xiaozhi's mother said her husband is a heavy mobile phone user as he uses the device for work and would sometimes play games on it for relaxation.

"Before this, we didn't think using the phone all day was an issue, and we didn't realise this child was so sensitive," said the mother.

After reading the essay, Xiaozhi's father felt guilty for spending too little time with his son and promised to take time off every week to keep him company, said the mother.

Some netizens have been moved by the boy's heartfelt appeal, while others felt the father should not be faulted. "Companionship is always the most precious love," said Weibo user Wei Wei.

"There are always two sides to a story. I make a living with my phone. Without it, I have no money for food," commented another user, Meng Le Sheng, on Weibo.

But the essay has also drawn concern from some. "Trade his life for a phone? This is a serious problem. Daddy, put down the phone now. You must teach your child that life is precious," said a Weibo user with the handle Mei Kai Yan Xiao.

Dark clouds loom but S'pore is never helpless: Tharman

Republic must prepare the young for new world, boost innovative capabilities, says DPM

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

The clouds gathering over the global economy will probably grow darker in the years to come, but the situation for Singapore is not bleak, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam has said.

He said in a Facebook post on Friday that Singapore can still do well by educating the young for a new world, developing deeper skills in every job and paying special attention to helping those who lose their jobs.

Another important area is to strengthen the innovative capabilities of Singapore businesses and build on what Mr Tharman considers Singapore's biggest international asset, "our credibility among countries and businesses from around the world".

His post on the final day of the four-day World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, paints a picture of a very divided world, made worse by fragmented politics in most democracies, and warns that things will probably get worse before a return to a strong centre in the politics of advanced democracies.

At the WEF, which he attended with Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat and Communications and Information Minister S. Iswaran, Mr Tharman said he attended about three dozen meetings over three days with political, business and civil society leaders from around the world.

He gave his basic take from these meetings. One, the world's major powers are more divided than they have been since the end of the Cold War 30 years ago.

He added that the United States-China trade conflict is a symptom of deeper and more enduring problems.

Two, technological rivalry is a reality and the prospect of a world divided into technological blocs will have major consequences for innovation and growth.

Three, the deeply divided people within advanced nations which are the "biggest difficulties" and that is the heart of the problem, he said. The exception is Japan.

"Until these domestic divisions and the loss of trust in political leaders are repaired, there is little hope of fixing the divisions in the international order," said Mr Tharman.

"A spirit of common interests globally, and of wanting to resolve problems in a cooperative way, will not return until there is a sense of shared interests among people at home, in their own societies."

This lack of cooperation and shared interests is also why the world is failing in its race against climate change "with dire consequences for people and the natural environment everywhere", he added.

Noting that populist leaders and extreme parties are now part of the mainstream, Mr Tharman sees little hope of repairing the domestic divisions soon.

"Politicians of all stripes, and businesses too, need the humility to understand why ordinary working people have voted this way," he said, adding that there was more humility at the WEF this year.

"Things will probably have to get a lot worse within the advanced democracies before there is a return of a strong centre in politics, and forward-looking policies to help the majority of people to improve their lives."



RETURN OF STRONG CENTRE

Things will probably have to get a lot worse within the advanced democracies before there is a return of a strong centre in politics, and forward-looking policies to help the majority of people to improve their lives.

SINGAPORE'S DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM

In the meantime, ordinary people will suffer the costs most of all, much more than the elite, he said, noting the unfortunate irony and tragedy of the situation.

For Singapore, the troubled global picture means it has to redouble its effort to develop strengths in the people that the world finds useful, he wrote.

Mr Tharman said Singapore is on a good track, citing its foreign relations and free trade agreements that will open up more growth opportunities, including the soon-to-be concluded trade pact with the European Union.

"We are also working with countries in the Eurasian economic community (Russia and its neighbours), the Middle East and Latin America to free up channels for trade and investment," he added.

In addition, more global businesses want to create hubs in Singapore for innovation and to serve Asian markets, he wrote.

He also noted that international healthcare foundations, which tackle global infectious diseases, are keen as well to develop a base in Singapore as they are confident in its ability to protect data and in its clinical research capabilities.

In highlighting these factors, Mr Tharman pointed out that "Singapore is never helpless".

He added: "If we keep building on our skills and capabilities, and the trust the world has in us, we will do well even with the clouds hanging over the world."

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India celebrates 70th Republic Day



Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers riding their camels during yesterday's Republic Day parade in New Delhi. Large crowds thronged the parade, which featured a cultural extravaganza of dances and gymnastics, colourful floats from Indian states, and a show of military hardware. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW DELHI • India showcased its cultural heritage and military hardware in the capital yesterday as the country celebrated its 70th Republic Day, with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as the guest of honour.

The South African leader joined President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a parade in New Delhi, the main attraction of national celebrations to commemorate the country's Constitution. India attained independence from British rule in 1947 and its Constitution came into force on Jan 26, 1950.

India's independence hero and apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, was in focus at the Republic Day, with several tableaus depicting his life displayed at the parade.

India is this year celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi, who had a special connection with South Africa. Gandhi lived in South Africa for 21 years and it was there that he conceived the idea of non-violent political resistance.

Singapore's President Halimah Yacob and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong have written to Mr Kovind and Mr Modi respectively to congratulate them on the celebrations, the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

In her letter to Mr Kovind, Madam Halimah said Singapore and India enjoy a special relationship rooted in deep historical ties, vibrant people-to-people linkages, regular high-level exchanges and strong economic cooperation.

"I am confident that relations between our two nations will continue to strengthen in the years to come," she said.

In his letter to Mr Modi, Mr Lee sent his warmest congratulations to India, and noted that the country has achieved great strides in its development as well as on the international stage. "The longstanding friendship between Singapore and India continues to expand with each passing year. Your two visits to Singapore last year gave strong momentum to our Strategic Partnership, especially in new areas of cooperation such as fintech and innovation," he said.

Large crowds thronged the parade, which featured a cultural extravaganza of dances and gymnastics as well as colourful floats from Indian states.

The parade included marching troops, military bands, a show of tanks, missiles and other military hardware, and camel-mounted paramilitary troops. DPA

Mum, uncle extradited by Canada to India over 'honour killing' in 2000

OTTAWA/CHANDIGARH • A court in Punjab's Sangrur district has sent a mother and an uncle, whom Canada extradited to face justice in India for their alleged roles in an "honour killing" case nearly 19 years ago, to four-day police remand, The New Indian Express reported yesterday.

The body of Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu was found with her throat slit in June 2000 in Punjab state. She was 25 years old at the time of her death.

Her mother Malkit Kaur Sidhu and uncle Surjit Singh Badesha, both Canadian citizens of Indian origin, have been accused by the Indian authorities of planning her murder.

Sangrur senior superintendent of police Sandeep Garg said the two will be questioned over the alleged routing of money to contract killers for the murder and other information, the newspaper report added.

Indian prosecutors have said the pair furiously opposed the young woman's marriage to a poor rickshaw driver, which the victim had kept secret for a year.

After revealing her marriage to her family, the victim reportedly flew from Canada to India to reunite with her husband, Mr Mithu Sidhu.

The couple was later attacked as they rode a scooter in a village near Sangrur in June 2000. Her husband was severely beaten and left for dead, while the woman was kidnapped and later killed.

The slain woman's mother and uncle allegedly paid a Punjab police officer to hire the attackers.

Seven men were eventually convicted of the crime in India, but several of those convictions were overturned on appeal.

The family has denied involvement in the killing, and fought extradition all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled against them in 2017.

A last-ditch effort to avoid extradition by claiming an abuse of process failed last December.

Inspector Amardeep Singh Rai with Punjab police told Canadian public broadcaster CBC that the extradition process took an unusually long time, but the two suspects landed in Delhi on Thursday morning.

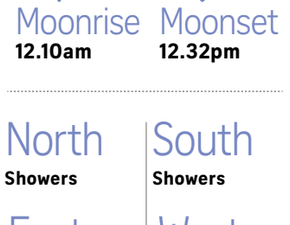
The lengthy effort, he said, will "send a clear message ... anybody committing a crime here, especially the heinous crime of killing their own daughter, will be brought to book".

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Weather

Singapore

24/33°C



Today

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.

Outlook

Monday: Afternoon thundery showers.

Tuesday: Windy with passing showers.

Air quality

PSI
52-57 (Moderate)
24-hour reading as of 4pm yesterday

Sunrise	Sunset
7.16am	7.19pm

Moonrise	Moonset
12.10am	12.32pm

North	South
Showers	Showers
East	**West**
Showers	Showers
Central	
Showers	

Tides

Today: 3.48am (2.8m), 9.45am (1.2m), 3.41pm (2.8m), 10.09pm (0.9m).

Tomorrow: 4.30am (2.7m), 10.43am (1.1m), 4.50pm (2.5m), 10.58pm (1.3m).





Germany, France, Spain issue Venezuela's Maduro an ultimatum

Call polls within eight days or we'll recognise Guaido, 3 nations warn

MADRID • Spain, France and Germany yesterday gave embattled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro an ultimatum, saying they would recognise opposition leader Juan Guaido as president unless he calls elections within eight days.

The ultimatum comes as international pressure mounts on the Maduro regime to agree to a new vote, with the United States, Canada and major South American players already recognising Mr Guaido, who proclaimed himself acting president of Venezuela during massive street rallies last week.

The US was yesterday pushing for a United Nations Security Council statement expressing full support for Venezuela's National Assembly as the country's "only democratically elected institution", but Russia was expected to block the move, diplomats said.

After four years of economic pain that has left Venezuelans short of food and medicine and driven more than two million to flee, Mr Guaido is trying to oust Mr Maduro following controversial elections that saw the socialist leader sworn in for a second term.

"If within eight days there are no fair, free and transparent elections called in Venezuela, Spain will recognise Juan Guaido as Venezuelan president" so that he himself can call such polls, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a televised announcement.

French President Emmanuel Macron followed suit in a tweet, saying "the Venezuelan people must be able to freely decide on their future", as did German government spokesman Martina Fietz.

The coordinated announcements are the most explicit yet from European Union countries as the 28-member bloc struggles to draft a joint statement reflecting its position on the crisis in Venezuela.

Spain had wanted the EU to take a tough line on Mr Maduro by calling for immediate elections, failing which the bloc as a whole would recognise Mr Guaido.

But countries like Austria, Greece and Portugal are much more reluctant. Greece's ruling party Syriza has publicly backed Mr Maduro, with party secretary Panos Skourletis voicing "full support and solidarity" for what he called "the legal president".

Spain is closely linked to Venezuela, a former colony, as some 200,000 of its nationals live there. Mr Sanchez insisted yesterday that Spain is "not looking to impose or remove governments in Venezuela, we want democracy and free elections in Venezuela".

US President Donald Trump's administration has spearheaded the international pressure on Mr Maduro, who accuses Washington of being behind an attempted "coup" by declaring his regime "illegitimate".

The UN Security Council began meeting yesterday at the request of Washington.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, along with several other ministers, were expected to address the 15-member body.

However, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday that Moscow would oppose a US push for the Security Council to back Mr Guaido as interim president. Council statements must be agreed by consensus.

With Venezuelan allies China and Russia holding veto power in the Security Council, there is little chance the UN body will agree on a resolution.

Washington's support for Mr Guaido led Mr Maduro to close the US embassy and consulates and break diplomatic ties.

US diplomats in Venezuela had until yesterday to leave the country, but Washington has refused to fully comply with the exit order. Mr Guaido is instead urging the US diplomats to stay and keep the embassy's doors open.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS



Venezuela's National Assembly head Juan Guaido (riding pillion on motorcycle) leaving after attending a gathering with opposition supporters at Bolivar Square in Chacao, eastern Caracas, on Friday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WorldBriefs

US agrees on draft deal: Taleban

KABUL • Taleban officials said US negotiators yesterday agreed on a draft peace deal stipulating the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan within 18 months of the agreement being signed.

The details were provided by Taleban sources at the end of six days of talks with US special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar aimed at ending the United States' longest war.

They have yet to be confirmed by US officials.

Mr Khalilzad is heading to the Afghan capital Kabul to brief President Ashraf Ghani after the longer-than-expected talks, the sources and a diplomat said. A key provision to the deal included a ceasefire but the sources said they had yet to confirm a timeline. REUTERS

68 die in Sulawesi floods, landslides

JAKARTA • At least 68 people have been killed and thousands were forced to flee their homes after floods and landslides hit the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, an official said yesterday.

Some 6,700 people in 14 districts have been evacuated and are now living in shelters, schools, tents or mosques.

The number of evacuees has doubled from Friday after disaster mitigation officials managed to get access to previously isolated districts. Six people are still missing.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Spanish toddler found dead in well

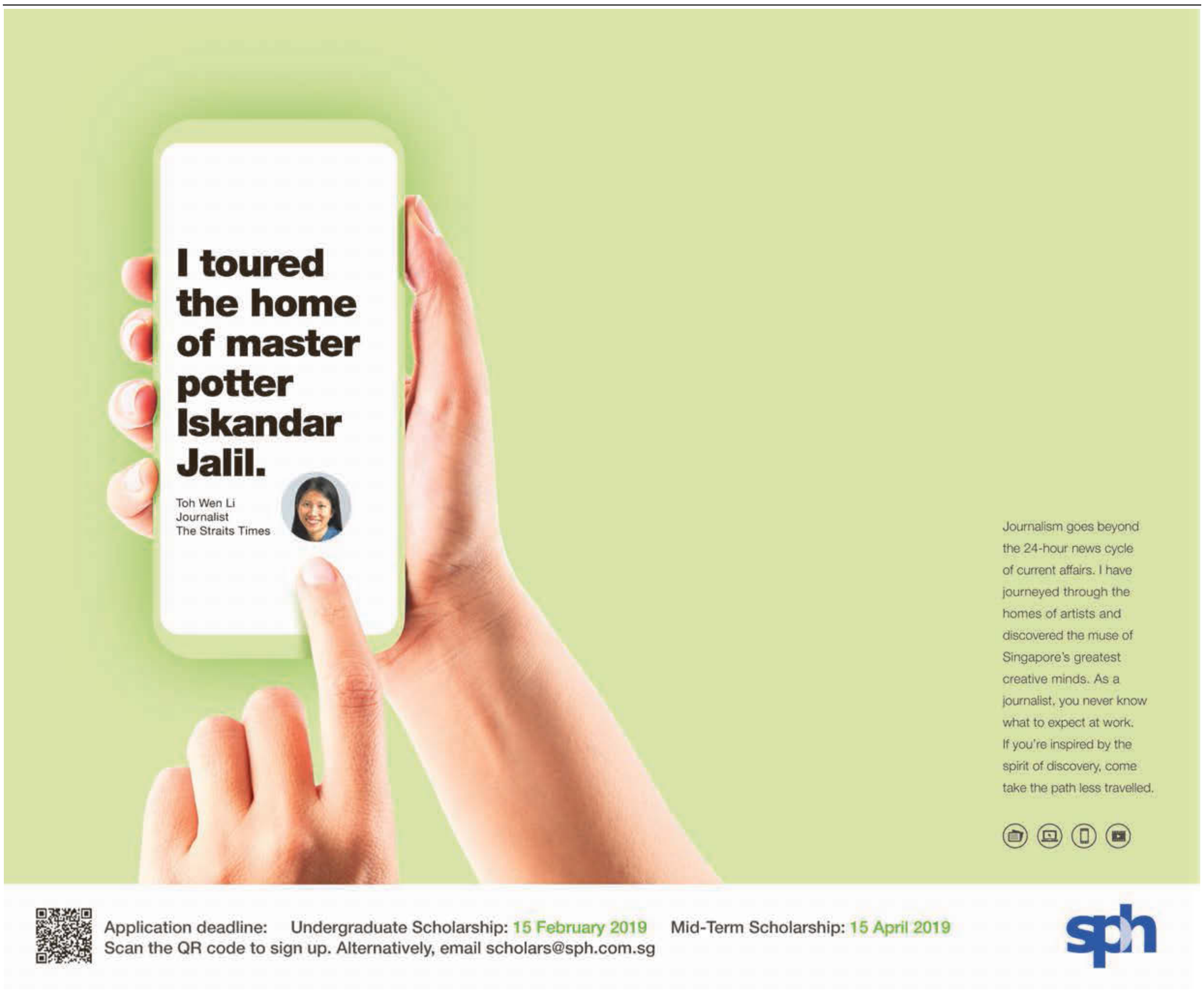
TOTALAN (Spain) • Spain grieved yesterday after a toddler who fell into a well was found dead in a tragic end to an intense 13-day rescue operation fraught with danger and setbacks.

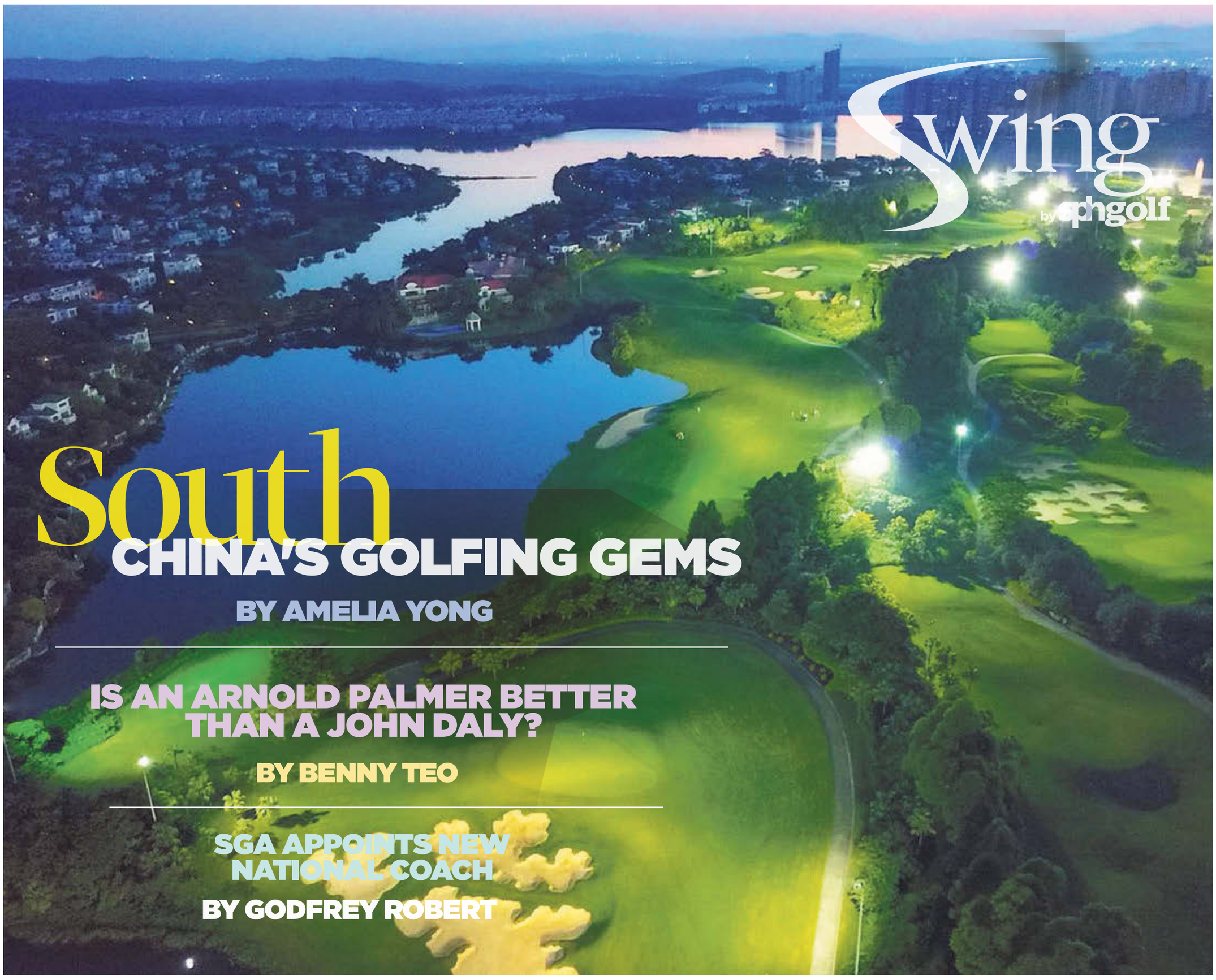
Hundreds of engineers, police and miners had been working non-stop to try to reach two-year-old Julen Rosello, who plunged down a narrow, illegal well on Jan 13 while his parents prepared lunch nearby in Totalan, a southern town near Malaga. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Oscar-winning composer dies at 86

PARIS • Prolific French composer Michel Legrand, who won three Oscars and five Grammys during a career spanning more than half a century, died yesterday at age 86.

His music spanned a wide range of styles and genres, and he composed for more than 200 film and TV productions. He died at his home in Paris with his wife, actress Macha Meril, at his side, his spokesman said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE





South

CHINA'S GOLFING GEMS

BY AMELIA YONG

IS AN ARNOLD PALMER BETTER THAN A JOHN DALY?

BY BENNY TEO

SGA APPOINTS NEW NATIONAL COACH

BY GODFREY ROBERT

ROLEX

THE DAY-DATE 40

The international symbol of performance and success, reinterpreted with a modernised design and a new-generation mechanical movement. It doesn't just tell time. It tells history.



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editor's letter

BY BENNY TEO

SERGIO GARCIA WOWS SINGAPORE

Singapore will always be a special place for Sergio Garcia. The famous Spanish golfer celebrated his birthday each of the the previous two times that he came for the SMBC Singapore Open, and this time it was no different.



A personalised Tour360 Birthday Cake for Garcia.



Sergio Garcia poses in the new Tour360 XT.

"We (his partner Angela Akins and infant daughter Azalea) celebrated my birthday together last week but it's very nice for adidas to do this for me. adidas Golf and I been togther for 20 years and it's a very special relationship so that means a lot," said the 39-year-old during the launch of the brand's new Tour 360 XT shoes featuring the series' first spikeless model.

"The new shoes feels great. The great thing about adidas is that they never get complacent, even though they make great apparel, they are always pushing themselves, always trying to take one step farther and bring something extra to all the gear that they do," said the brand loyalist.

This happened during the Tuesday of the tournament week with the then defending champion all smiles as he gamely participated in a cocktail mixing segment with local radio deejay cum golf professional Heng Su-Ann, actress cum former Fox Sports host Natalia Ng and teaching professional Lip Ooi, all ambassadors of adidas Golf.

"It's great to be back in Singapore defending my title. It's a golf course that I really like, so hopefully I can have a good start like last year and build up to another great season."

And while he did not win this year, his overall eight-under-par (276) score was enough to secure him a tie for seventh, boosting his morale as he gears up towards what is going to be a hectic season ahead due to the shortening of the US PGA Tour calendar in 2019.

"You're not going to be able to rest like you did before but the good thing is that if you get going, get playing well, you can really have a lot of good weeks in a row. So that's a positive."

However, he also cautioned, "If you're not playing as well, hopefully by playing more, you start playing better."

Judging by the year that has just past, he may have cause for concern, for after winning the Singapore Open, he went winless and missed the cuts at all four Majors until finally securing a second victory at the Andalucía Valderrama Masters in October, an event that he also hosted.

"It was a tough three months from April to July, it was a little bit tougher, but in the beginning of the year it was really good and at the end of the year, it was really good; at the Ryder Cup, winning in Valderrama and having a lot of top-10s to finish the year," surmised the Spaniard.

While his performance did not justify a call-up to Thomas Bjorn's Ryder Cup team, the European captain made Garcia his final Captain's Pick anyway and that turned out to be a revelation in terms of how the former vice-captain rallied his younger teammates towards victory against the Americans.

He also beat Sir Nick Faldo's record of 25 points that stood for 21 years by winning his singles match against Rickie Fowler 2&1 to lead the historical race by half a point.

"Ideally, we would like to keep improving on that 25-and-a-half points. It's a record I've never really thought about, until it happened. As much as that event means to me, it's amazing to be on top of that list and in front of some amazing players."

Comparing his Ryder Cup record with his maiden victory at Augusta National two years back, he cherishes both but in very different ways.

"The Masters is something more individual, the Ryder Cup (record) is an individual achievement but I had help from my partners, from foursomes and fourballs, so it feels a little more of a group achievement than the Masters, which is just by myself," he explained.

In terms of the rivalry at the biennial event, his attitude is always towards friendship building across both sides, even though it can be highly competitive.

"Both teams are trying to win for country and continent. But we also play together week in and week out and we're friends.

"So it's a competition, it's an event and we're both trying to do the best we can but at the end of the day, we're still friends, we're still people and we enjoy each other's company. The Ryder Cup should build friendships not break them and that's what the event is for me."

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BY GODFREY ROBERT

SGA APPOINTS MATT BALLARD AS FULL-TIME NATIONAL COACH

QUEENSLANDER COMES WITH BIG REPUTATION TO DRIVE HIGH-PERFORMANCE GOLF

It was encouraging that the Singapore team, with a relatively new slate of players, finished third in the recent Putra Cup in Myanmar. Much credit for that goes to the three part-time coaches, Scott Barr, Justin Han and Goh Kun Yang who, despite their fulltime jobs, devoted time and effort to raise the playing standards of Singapore's leading amateurs.



Considering the added time and effort the Singapore Golf Association would like to focus in their High-Performance Programme, it has hired renowned Australian coach Matt Ballard, as Full-Time National Coach, to continue driving national and junior golf development.

The SGA is currently in the development process of nurturing new talent and grooming young golfers. And believing that Ballard, with his vast experience, can help in its High-Performance Programme by taking over a fresh team of golfers from the National, Development and Junior squads.

Ballard (above, right), 41, comes with a big reputation, having worked for numerous years with Tour players like Adam Scott, Michael Sim, Adam Bland and Sam Brazel.

He was also one of the coaches for Golf Queensland's High Performance Programme and coached at the Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club in the Gold Coast.

Having been involved with the development and execution of training programmes for juniors, elite amateurs and professionals, Ballard looks a perfect fit for the SGA's plans.

A former player himself, he was a past captain of the Queensland State amateur golf team and member of the Australian National Squad. He had also played on the Australasia and Japan Tours as a professional.

Ballard: "I saw the youngsters at one tournament, and I was impressed. I believe I can work with the various squads and hopefully things work out fine during my stint here."

"Our selection committee sieved through over 50 applications from Singapore and all over the world. We spent days conducting Live and Skype interviews with the shortlisted candidates. We also have had the two final candidates flown in to Singapore as part of the final interview process.

"We are confident that Matt will work with our players' individual coaches and, together, develop our talented golfers in Singapore. I am convinced that with Matt's coaching background and personality, he will be a great asset for SGA and our golfers," said SGA Vice-President and Chairperson Training and Development committee Lyn Sen.

SGA General Manager Jerome Ng added: "Further development of the High-Performance training programme is still the most important task. One of Matt's main tasks will be the realisation of existing strategic plans for the period leading into SEA Games and to nurture young talent.

"At the same time, to implement an effective training and preparation programme that would best facilitate our experienced and young golfers alike.

Following the successful conclusion of the SMBC Singapore Open last week, local professional also former National Squad member Johnson Poh and National amateur golfer James Leow finished tied 38th and 69th respectively.

It is an exciting time ahead as the SGA forges its long-term plans to grow the sport and develop Singapore into a leading golfing nation in South-East Asia.

ANDRE AND CALLISTA SMASH THEIR WAY TO VICTORY

Every time we reflect on past Singapore Opens, there is banter and a buoyant mood about 2007 winner Angel Cabrera and the big drives he hit that week.

The massive Cabrera, from Argentina and one of the longest-hitters on the PGA Tour, would be proud to hear that a Singaporean teenager smashed a 324.3-metre drive at the inaugural SGA Long Drive Challenge last week.

Held in conjunction with the Discover Golf Carnival, Andre, 17, easily claimed the Boys' Junior Amateur title with that solid whack.

In fact, the Development Squad player's drive was the longest across all categories.

Andre said "I usually hit it to about 280 metres, but today I just tried to give it a bit more by hitting really big hooks for more hang time and roll.

"I have been spending a lot of time in the gym. I can see that it has paid off. I have gained about 20 metres off the tee."

However, Andre cautioned: "Just because I can hit the ball far doesn't mean that I am guaranteed to score well. I still need to work on my short iron and wedges to do well."

Callista Chen, 20, one of Singapore's female amateurs, hit the longest drive by a female, recording a 239.3m tee shot in the final. Although this was a few metres short of her best drive in the qualifying round, the drive was good enough to secure her the win in the Ladies' Mid-Amateur Category. "It's definitely an honour to win this title. In the final round I was trying to be relaxed, reminding myself to just turn through the shot and give it my best hit."

Like Andre, Callista credits her prodigious length off the tee to her fitness regimen over the years, saying, "Our programme implemented a lot of fitness training to improve agility, strength and stability. We did a lot of sprinting, planks and medicine ball throwing and even boxing at one point. I didn't understand it back then, but as I get older, I realised that these fitness games and activities helped me gain physical strength and increased my club head speed."

Golfers vied for the coveted title of Singapore's Long Drive Champion in three separate categories: the Junior Amateur (18 years and under), the Mid-Amateur (19 to 49 years) and the Senior Amateur (50 years and above).

In the Senior category, the Men's and Women's titles went to the Sen couple, Jiten and Lyn. They recorded a total distance of 259.8m and 201.9m respectively in the finals.

The Discover Golf Carnival, jointly organised with Lagardère Sports and Totts Golf, featured a fun-filled extravaganza of golf-themed activities.

The Kids Zone proved to be an instant hit with innovative challenges that included Golf Bowling, Bullseye Putt-Putt, Tic Tac Putt and Foot Golf, while the skills challenge booths like the Pitching Bullseye Target, Long Putt Challenge and Chip In For Arc Challenge put the more experienced golfers to the test.

The carnival was a perfect opportunity to introduce the game of golf to the uninitiated. Ken Lim, 43, who brought his three children to the event, said: "I am interested to expose them to golf to see whether they have a liking for it and before I start them on golf lessons."

Mrs Chaw, who came with her sons (Chaw Liang, 14, Chaw Zheng, 12, and Chaw Sheng , 10), said: "My boys have been playing golf for two years now. It is a wonderful game. It helps them to focus and also trains up their patience."

The carnival, now into its third edition, first started as a lead-up event to last year's SMBC Singapore Open in 2018. The second edition of the event was held at the Mandai Executive Golf Course last September. **— Godfrey Robert**

RESULTS (winners received a TaylorMade Driver to be specially fitted):
Boys' Junior: 1 Andre Chong (324.3m). 2 Brandon Han (311.4m). 3 Sean Lee (296.9m). **Girls' Junior:** 1 Shang Yu (223.4m). 2 Angel Lim (223.3m). 3 Maya Cala (217.5m). **Men's Senior:** 1 Dr Jiten Sen (259.8m). 2 Ivan Hoyes (247.6m). 3 Scott Roberts (174.4m). **Women's Senior:** 1 Lyn Sen (201.9m). 2 Emily Lee (186.3m). 3 Belinda Young (176.9m). **Men's Mid-Amateur:** 1 Low Wee Jin (304.8m). 2 Erwyn Lam (302.3m). 3 Lucius Toh (300.4m). **Women's Mid-Amateur:** 1 Callista Chen (239.3m). 2 Clara Ang (218.4m).

photo courtesy of Singapore Golf Association

BY
JEREMY THESEIRA

ANALYSE YOUR SWING AT THE SPH GOLF TRAVEL FAIR 2019

With just two months to go, the SPH Golf Travel Fair 2019 has already secured a remarkable mix of exhibitors that will be offering the very best deals on golf travel, equipment, apparel and much more. Of the latest entrants to Singapore's unique golf travel fair are Batam's Radisson Golf & Convention Center, China tee time booking application, Gaotoo, and GOLFTEC, one of the industry's best golf instruction centres.

Opening their doors in Singapore in July 2017, GOLFTEC provides a fact-based analysis of the golf swing with instant video feedback and proprietary Motion Measurement Technology.

Along with their dedicated coaches, visitors to the fair will get to experience first-hand the high tech swing analysis with data accumulated from over 20 years of swing research at the GOLFTEC simulator throughout the duration of the event.

• *The SPH Golf Travel Fair 2019 will take place on 21 - 24 March at Takashimaya Square, B2.*

BY
BENNY TEO

THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SMOKES

I want an Arnold Palmer please. And add a dash of vodka by the way. No? That's a John Daly? Oh well, let's have a Daly then.

That would likely constitute my conversation at the 19th-hole bar after a round of golf.

Thankfully for the golfing world, IMG's Mark McCormack is more astute in picking the right gentleman for the hefty job of elevating the sport of golf into global renown through a then burgeoning television age.

And so he picked Arnold Palmer as his first client back in 1960. Soon, Jack Nicklaus and that South African fitness buff Gary Player would follow, forming a triumvirate that would go down in history as golf's first global superstars.

As the forefather of them all however, The King, as he is fondly termed, had led his army of fans, known as "Arnie's Army", from Augusta National, throughout the rest of America and across to the links of Open championships, each time winning more over with his brand of swashbuckling play and matinee idol looks.



In 1967, after securing seven Major titles, Rolex came calling and thus gave birth to a 50-year friendship that has seen the Swiss luxury timekeeper step into the world of The King and his fellow merry men (and later women too), growing the sport of golf and fortifying its timeless values of sportsmanship and honesty.

Today, both McCormack and Palmer have passed on but the Rolex train continues to roll, embracing more testimonees who, like their beloved former king, represents all that is good with the game.

Rolex has also invested millions into initiatives that harvest the potential of youth across America, Asia and Latin America and most recently, helped prop the European Tour with a multi-million dollar Rolex Series of events to rival the PGA Tour's popularity.

In Singapore, Rolex is a supporter of the SMBC Singapore Open that has just ended and the HSBC Women's World Championship that is to come. Their reach and love for golf growing as time continues to tick by, without which, the golfing world will surely suffer a loss.

But what if they had not chosen Arnie? What if, like me, they had gone for smokingly Long John? Rhetorical? Yes. But probably not, no offence to the former two-time Major champion. For longevity's sake, you can sip on Dalys once in a while but it's healthier to have Arnold Palmers to really quench the thirst.

photos by Rolex



BY
AMELIA YONG

SOUTH CHINA GEMS

A mere four hours flight from Singapore is the hustling port city of Guangzhou. Also known as Canton, this populous city does not only attract businesses and tourists but also golfers. Here are some of its finest examples and they will also be here during the SPH Golf Travel Fair from March 21 to 24.

FOISON GOLF CLUB

Foison Golf Club (above) features an elegant modern-Asian clubhouse that overlooks two majestic golf courses from Cynthia Dye and Neil Haworth.

The Haworth 18 is a championship course that features lakes, hills and plains integrated into the existing terrain and vegetation. Comparatively different is Cynthia Dye's course, which is constructed higher above sea level and amidst the mountains.

There is an effort by the designer to blend man-made and nature, which results in a golf course that bared the natural beauty of the mountains with the enjoyment of challenging play.

DRAGON LAKE GOLF CLUB

Designed by Dick Davidson and managed under the IMG group, Dragon Lake Golf Club is part of a bigger property scheme surrounded by hotels and holiday villages and is home to the Asian Games 27-holes that has hosted several professional tournaments and events. The three 9-hole loops with vastly different characteristics transport golfers to a different time and space all within a stone's throw away.

COUNTRY GARDEN HOLIDAY ISLANDS

Further up north is Holiday Islands, designed by Liang Guo-kun who used the surrounding forests and lakes as a natural advantage and built the course around these features. Similar to Dragon Lake, they offer golfers 27 holes over three courses to pick and choose from – The 'A', 'B', and 'C' Course – that play longer than the standard fare but fortunately, have generously wide fairways.

COUNTRY GARDEN JUN'AN GOLF CLUB



The fifth large scale Country Garden branded product that features a stunning 18-hole setup also designed by Liang Guo-kun. A woodland course as opposed to Holiday Islands, it plays to 7,018 yards from the tips and is constructed with some spectacular holes that will require good course management to conquer.

YALONG BAY GOLF CLUB



Designed by Robert Trent Jones Jnr., Yalong Bay Golf Club is every golfer's must-play at Sanya on Hainan Island, or what the local authorities term, the "Hawaii of China".

The golf course boasts lush tropical vegetation and native grasses that line each hole, with glistening water features constructed within the playing grounds to give the course more character amidst its broad fairways and 98 well-placed bunkers.

RED GORGE GOLF CLUB

Also known as Sun Valley Sanya Golf Resort, it is similar to Yalong Bay in that there is a resort located nearby, making stay-and-play options an obvious choice.

Offering three 9-hole courses with fairly wide fairways and big greens that slopes and undulates, a caddie's superb skills may be needed to steer away from three putts.

OTHER COURSES IN HAINAN

Other notable courses at the southern end of China's Hainan Island is the Sanya Luhuitou Golf Club, a par-72 design by Neil Haworth with stunning seaside views of the Dadong Sea, and Sanya Haitang Bay Peninsula Golf Club, home to a championship 18-hole seaside course surrounded by the inland sea and South China Sea.

And in Haikou, the northern city of Hainan Island, resides the world's largest golfing facility in the 13-course Mission Hills Golf Club. A 30-minute drive from the city sits R&F Mangrove Bay Golf Club, designed with lakes and tropical plants which integrates with the mangrove trees and wildlife throughout the course.

West Coast Golf Club is yet another notable course within Haikou, located on the coast of the Qiongzhou Straits directly opposite Meishi MayFlower International Golf Club. The championship Par-72 18-hole golf course is the first Dye design by the Dye family in China and covers an area of 107.67 hectares.

ALL-EXPENSES PAID TRIP TO THAILAND

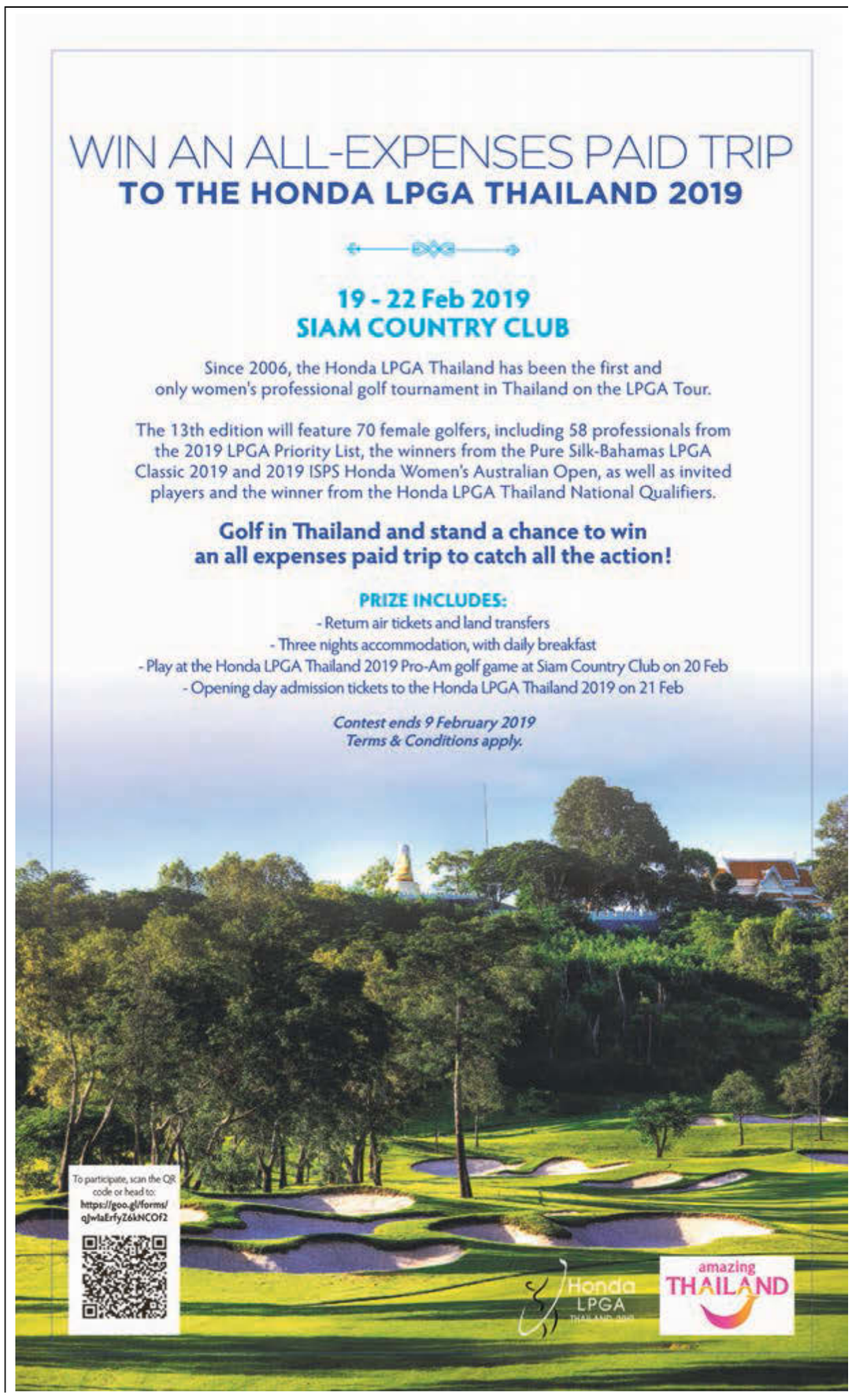
Recent golf travellers to Thailand stand a chance to return, all-expenses paid, to catch the Honda LPGA Thailand 2019 from February 19 to 22.

Sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, two lucky golfers will have the opportunity to catch the 13th edition of the Honda LPGA Thailand 2019 that will feature 70 of the world's best professionals competing on the Old Course at Siam Country Club in Pattaya from February 21 to 24.

To qualify for this all-expenses paid trip, contestants must have travelled to Thailand recently to play at least two rounds of golf anytime between January 1 and February 9 this year.

Thereafter, the two winners will be selected on February 13 where they will receive return air tickets on Thai Airways, three nights accommodation with daily breakfast, a spot to play at the Pro-Am golf game on February 20 and opening day admission tickets to the Honda LPGA Thailand 2019.

• *For more details and to enter the contest, head to www.sphgolf.com and click on the contest banner. Terms and conditions apply.*



playit



BY BENNY TEO



Loch Palm Golf Club (left) and Red Mountain Golf Club (below).

LOCH PALM AND RED MOUNTAIN



Two sibling courses belonging to MBK Golf properties sited beside each other in Phuket offer distinctive golfing adventures that will surely excite the golf lover.

The elder of the two, Loch Palm Golf Club was designed in 1996 by Dr.Sukitti Klangwisai around Crystal Lake, which provides a central theme and the source of challenging water hazard, to an otherwise benign golf course.

At 6,422 yards, it is one of the shorter courses around. However, due to its length, or lack thereof, the water hazards on the front nine become especially tough to negotiate.

The loch (lake in Gaelic) casually cuts across many fairways making tee shots and approaches something to ponder a little more. The short second hole is one such example. A par-five with a significant amount of bunkers makes threading this hole a dangerous affair.

The back nine has some tighter and more undulating holes, starting with the short but testing downhill par-four, 10th hole. Playing more difficult, the back nine also offers some amazing views from various elevated points on the course.

The 14th, which is a par-three, is perhaps its finest hole. Playing the hole, a sense of fear cannot be avoided on this downhill teeshot to a two-tiered green 30 metres down and surrounded on three sides by water. Club and shot selection here are key.

One good thing here that is uncommon in resort golf courses is that golf carts are optional and one may choose to enjoy walking this beautiful golf course together with well-informed caddies ready to offer advice or assistance whenever needed.

RED MOUNTAIN

Arguably the best golf course in Phuket, Red Mountain Golf Club is a unique combination of modern design, interesting site and challenging play. At 6,781 yards, it is also short but hazarously difficult.

Formerly a tin mine, Red Mountain is designed by Jonathon Mark Morrow, who also revised Dr Klangwisai's course next door in 2007, and works its way through the mountains, forests, lakes and cliffs so every hole feels secluded and apart from the other.

Golfers face the full range of nature's hazards; wind, water, slopes and elevation changes. This is the highest golf course on Phuket Island and dramatic views are seen at many points on the golf course.

tried & tested

TAYLORMADE M5, M6

How time flies. We are already into the fourth generation of the M-Series metal woods with the recent launch of the new TaylorMade M5 and M6. A pioneer in fast driver and woods technology, the engineers at TaylorMade have made the face even thinner, past the USGA COR limits, but then brought it back to within boundary by injecting speed resin through two visible ports in the face.

Coupled with the new Twist Face technology introduced in the previous M3, M4 models, this new range promises to be faster, slicker and longer.



• *Distributed by MST Golf, the TaylorMade M5 and M6 driver and woods will be available at leading golf stores islandwide beginning first week of February.*

TITLEIST PRO V1 AND PRO V1X

The biggest takeaway of the new Titleist Pro V1 and Pro V1x is that both balls are now faster and longer. The second difference is that now, choosing between the two is no longer just about speed but also trajectory.

The difference between the two has narrowed such that someone who previously uses a Pro V1x may now gain more penetrating distance with the Pro V1 but at the same time, experience improved softness and spin around the greens.

"I'm getting all the ball speed I had with the prior generation Pro V1x and more. Plus, the new Pro V1 feels softer to me around the green," said Charles Howell III after winning the RSM Classic for his first PGA Tour victory in 11 years with it.

In terms of tech, the urethane cover, ionomeric casing and single (Pro V1) or dual (Pro V1x) core are similar to the 2017 models except that the outer urethane is now 17 per cent thinner, the ionomeric layer beneath is thicker (by 14 and 11 per cent respectively) and the inner core is stiffer than before while maintaining their soft centre. This change in composition is key to the new models.

• *Available beginning January 28 with new high optic yellow models available from March 15.*





PUMA GOLF PLAY LOOSE

Play Loose is inspired by vintage surf style, incorporating a custom coastal design along with subtle golf elements, for a fresh collection that is casual yet refined, with all the performance needed to dominate on course and look effortlessly cool off course. The collection balances sophistication with casual wear, refined chill if you will, with subtle attention to detail that is just as at home on the beach as it is on the links.

ADIDAS GOLF TOUR360 XT, XT SL AND XT SL BOA

Launched in an innovating way by 2018 SMBC Singapore Open champion Sergio Garcia at the tip of The Pyramid halfway house at Sentosa's Tanjong course, the country was introduced to the new Tour360 XT in one big social media push as guests frantically posted pictures and videos of Sergio mixing cocktails and chipping from the highest teebox in Sentosa.

Yet, there is good reason for this fanfare. This latest version of the brand's performance shoe is lighter, has eight spikes (two fewer than before) with the new X-Traxion lugs spread out across the bottom for greater flexibility and stability even on uneven lies.

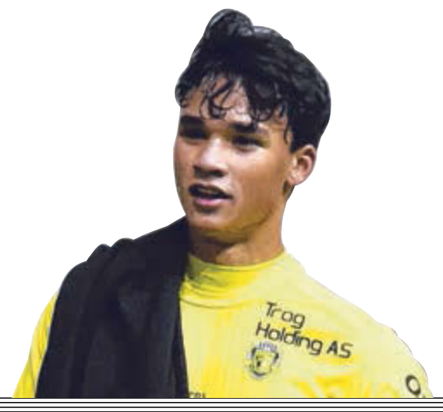


Also launched are the model's first spikeless (XT SL) version as well as spikeless with BOA closure system. The X-shaped "X-Torsion System" connects the heel and forefoot to provide stability and traction even without spikes, holding the foot in place throughout a fast-paced golf swing.



• *Comes in medium and wide options for the XT and XT SL, and wide only for BOA version. Available from February 1 at adidas Golf Takashimaya, Isetan Scotts and adidas.com.sg.*

Sport



Off to a flyer
Ikhsan Fandi scores first goal for his new club in a friendly.
A29



Japan's Naomi Osaka with the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup after her 7-6 (7-2), 5-7, 6-4 win over Petra Kvitova in the final which will see her become the first Asian singles world No. 1 tomorrow. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Australian Open 2019

THIS WORLD NO. 1 HAS 'CHARACTER'

Osaka shows courage, composure to become first Asian to claim tennis' top singles ranking



Rohit Brijnath
Assistant Sports Editor
In Melbourne

At the end, Naomi Osaka sank to her haunches at the baseline, head down, resting on her racket. Overcome, overwhelmed and finally over every obstacle. Then she ran to the net and Petra Kvitova generously and gracefully drew her into an embrace. Osaka knows how to win and Kvitova how to lose. Women's tennis is great theatre because it has an outstanding cast.

Osaka won 7-6 (7-2), 5-7, 6-4 and then apologised for not being a public speaker but a charmed crowd did not care. This was not the US Open and unkind boos, this was Melbourne and love at first forehand. Later she endearingly admitted she had forgotten to smile at the trophy presentation. Who talks like this, who plays like that? In her originality lies her appeal.

Osaka later said she was "tired" and this was understandable. After all, she won the Australian Open women's title twice on a cool night. She was up a set, had three consecutive match points in the second set and for a brief moment held the trophy with one hand. Then she wobbled and it slipped away.

Osaka lost the second set, covered her head with a towel and left the court and a reporter asked if she had got emotional. She grinned: "Did you not see my tears?"

She was hurting and yet she returned to win the title and this was an overcoming not just of a rival but of herself. There is an old word to describe this young woman. Character. As Kvitova said: "She's a really big player."

What is striking about Osaka is not just her shots but her self-possession, her ability to again find composure in the crucible. At the US Open she withstood Serena Williams' outburst and here her own hiccup of doubt. Kvitova – who said "I don't know how long it will take me to get over (the loss)" – played with heart but Osaka's was just a few millimetres bigger.

Of all Osaka's numbers on this night, one was pre-eminent. Not 33 which was the winners she hit, nor 192kmh which was her fastest serve. She has won only three titles in her career and two are Slams but it was not even that. The number that glittered was No. 1. Tomorrow she will be the first Asian to head the ranking list. Top of the planetary class. How very Asian of her.

Asian women have been sweeping aside self-doubt for years on sporting fields. They have won a football World Cup, figure skating championships, Olympic wrestling golds and last winter Mary Kom, 35, the mother of three, won her sixth world championship in boxing.

Li Na became the only Asian – man or woman – to seize a Grand Slam singles title yet the No. 1 ranking has eluded the continent, standing in the distance like a taunt.

Now Osaka has got there and to see Li Na hand her the trophy yesterday was fitting and poignant. Osaka said she "wanted to cry a little bit" and it was a splendidly Asian moment. Of course, half of Osaka belongs to Haiti but that seems to be conveniently ignored.

The match was splendid to start with because if both women wear a perfume it is presumably called Aggression. If they were not shaving the net with ferocious shots, they were burning the fuzz off the ball.

Kvitova had chances to break but Osaka would not yield. Her right hand hammers defiance, her left fist clenches in belief. She is both an unusual superstar who wears her fame reluctantly and a stubborn player who snacks on pressure.

Osaka took the first-set tiebreaker whereupon Kvitova flexed her hand, which was once cut open by an intruder, and fought back. Above the sky turned orange, below was forged red-hot tennis.

Then, drama.

Kvitova was down 0-40 at 3-5 in the second set, but Osaka, with three match points, could not break. Then Osaka served for the match at 5-4 and was broken to 5-5. The crowd howled, the ladies shrieked. Osaka looked rattled and Kvitova grabbed the second set.

How Osaka refound her poise in the third set, how she calmed her nerves, how she did all this at 21, is what constitutes the mystery of champions. We see them play but never quite know how they handle fear. We watch their shots but never know the conviction which lines their insides. It takes courage to show the world your best.

When Osaka won the US Open, some cynics hemmed and sceptics hawed. It is fashionable to scoff at young talent as if they are shooting stars who are only passing by. But two Slams in a row is never a fluke; four three-set wins at this Open is not luck; 60 wins after winning the first set is not karma. It is worked for, it is talent, it is convincing, it is astonishing.

Tennis has a new leader and she is a child of her times. Not boastful but not given to false humility. Asked if she had surprised herself by the incredible things she had done, she replied: "Yes and no."

You cannot predict your rise, but Naomi Osaka knows you have to believe in it.

rohitb@sph.com.sg

The accolades

Your future is so bright, and your talent, drive, and determination will take you far.

BILLIE JEAN KING, WTA founder

My daughter is also half-Japanese. Hopefully this gives her the motivation to do something the same. Anything she wants, she can now do.

HITOSHI WATANABE, Japanese tennis fan. Osaka's father is Haitian.

I am very proud of the emergence of a new queen. I look forward to your continued accomplishments.

SHINZO ABE, Japan Prime Minister

Well, after winning the #usopen2018 Naomi Osaka became a star. And now, after winning the #australianopen and becoming world #1, she is a superstar! Congratulations Champ. And @Petra_Kvitova – you are the champion of life!!!

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA, 18-time Grand Slam champion

four-digit draw

Jan 26 2019

First ▶ 5333
Second ▶ 0171
Third ▶ 4087

STARTERS

1208	1320	2686
3948	6600	7541
8652	9164	9534
	9676	

CONSOLATIONS

0078	0148	0170
1806	2119	4115
5456	6890	8194
	9149	

Japan hails emergence of 'new tennis queen'

TOKYO • Japan rejoiced yesterday as Naomi Osaka clinched her second consecutive Grand Slam title and reached world No. 1, following her 7-6 (7-2), 5-7, 6-4 victory over Petra Kvitova in the women's singles final of the Australian Open.

She became the first Japanese tennis player to win the Australian Open and the first Asian to claim the singles world No. 1 ranking.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe led the tributes following her victory in Melbourne.

"The thrill of a hard-fought victory! Congratulations on winning the Australian Open, Naomi Osaka," Abe wrote on his official Twitter page. "I am very proud of the emergence of a new queen. I look forward to your continued accomplishments."

Her compatriot Kei Nishikori, who had to withdraw during his Australian Open quarter-final with Novak Djokovic through injury, also took to Twitter, congratulating Osaka with a series of thumbs-up, trophy and Japanese flag emojis.

Martina Navratilova, an 18-time Grand Slam singles champion, lauded "superstar" Osaka for her incredible rise to the top of her game.

She tweeted: "Well, after winning the #usopen2018 Naomi Osaka became a star. And now, after winning the #australianopen and becoming world #1, she is a superstar! Congratulations Champ. And @Petra_Kvitova – you are the champion of life!!!"

Local television channels showed people in Tokyo gathering to snatch a copy of a special edition of the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper detailing Osaka's victory.

In the ski resort of Hakuba, which hosted events during the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998, a small group of tennis fans celebrated as they watched the final at a local sports bar.

"We are so happy for her as a Japanese," said Keiko Kobayashi. "She is one of us and she represents us so well on the world stage."

Osaka, whose father is Haitian and mother is Japanese, has helped to break new ground in Japan, challenging the country's traditional self-image as a racially homogeneous country.

"My daughter is also half-Japanese," said Hitoshi Watanabe, as he bought a celebratory round of drinks at the Hakuba bar.

"Hopefully, this gives her the motivation to do something the same. Anything she wants, she can now do." REUTERS

Australian Open 2019

SHARMA PROUD OF BEING COMPETITIVE

S'pore-born Australian takes in the positives despite coming up short in mixed doubles final

Rohit Brijnath
Assistant Sports Editor
In Melbourne

Astra Sharma came to the Australian Open as an unknown and left with a Grand Slam runner-up trophy, headlines across Australia, India and Singapore and over A$150,000 (S$145,700). Her two-week journey has been a message: It's perfectly safe to dream.

Yesterday, Sharma – a citizen of Australia but born in Singapore – had the moment of her young life when she and her partner, John-Patrick Smith, entered Rod Laver Arena after the women's singles final to contest their mixed doubles final.

They lost 7-6 (7-3), 6-1 eventually to the third seeds Barbora Krejcikova and Rajeev Ram, but the smile on Sharma's 23-year-old face rightfully would not leave.

First Grand Slam events are supposed to be quiet educations: You come, walk softly, enjoy the free food, sit on a table next to Rafa, get a beating on court and leave chastised but inspired.

Not Sharma. She won three singles qualifying matches at the Open, played two main draw singles matches, one women's doubles match and five mixed doubles matches.

"It's been a great two weeks," she said later. "I came here wanting to play a lot of matches." And she's leaving having attracted some attention with her electric play.

Nick Kyrgios mentioned her in a tweet and Roger Rasheed, former coach of Lleyton Hewitt and Gael Monfils, tweeted that "she is the best female natural athlete I've ever seen come out of Australia".

Every small thing counts in sport, every tiny lesson, every little nugget stored away and for Sharma this fortnight has been the equivalent of a minor degree.

She has, she explained, felt the intensity of top-class tennis and strolled into some of its greatest courts. As she put it: "I got a huge amount of experience being exposed to that level of play."

The money she earned – more than she's ever made – is vital for tennis tugs sharply at the pockets. Her winnings will help buy plane tickets and pay for hotels for this game is an expensive travelling show. As her mother, Susan, agreed: "(The money) gives her a bit of a breather."

Many things were earned in the Melbourne heat and Sharma takes away a stronger sense of herself as an athlete. When asked what she did well at this Open, she replied: "I think I was pretty good at being competitive. I wasn't scared. It's tough going out on a Grand Slam stage and playing like you do in practice."

Susan says the experience has given her child "more confidence in herself and her ability" and its value can't be overstated. In the hard road that is tennis, players need validation of their hard work and that is what Sharma has got. She knows inside her that she belongs.

rohitb@sph.com.sg

NO FEAR

I think I was pretty good at being competitive. I wasn't scared. It's tough going out on a Grand Slam stage and playing like you do in practice.

ASTRA SHARMA, on her performance.



From left: Mixed doubles champions Barbora Krejcikova and Rajeev Ram posing with runners-up John-Patrick Smith and Astra Sharma after winning the final 7-6 (7-3), 6-1 yesterday. PHOTOS: REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Fierce rivalry promises fiery finale

MELBOURNE • For all the talk of the next generation at this year's Australian Open, it is the old guard who remain dominant.

The men's singles final today will be contested by two battle-hardened veterans, Novak Djokovic playing Rafael Nadal, world No. 1 against world No. 2, in the 53rd edition of their rivalry.

Seven years after their most famous encounter in Melbourne, they meet again at the Rod Laver Arena.

On the evidence of their performances throughout the past fortnight, it will not be a surprise if the quality of play comes close to that of the gruelling 2012 final – a 5hr 53min epic that ended with both so close to collapsing that they were provided chairs to sit on during the presentation ceremony.

Djokovic was the champion that day, and he is the slight favourite to triumph again with a 27-25 edge in their head-to-head record.

But Nadal has a 4-3 advantage in Grand Slam finals and has won the last three. In all Grand Slam meetings, he has a clear advantage over Djokovic, with a 9-5 record.

There is much at stake in the final. Fourteen-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic, 31, can move ahead of Roy Emerson and Roger Federer with a record seventh Australian Open crown.

Nadal, 32, has the opportunity to move to within two major titles of Federer's 20, and would then have the French Open – where he has won 11 times – to come in May. It has all the makings of a classic.

"He has played impressively throughout the tournament," Djokovic said of the Spaniard.

"He hasn't dropped a set. He looked as good as ever on the hard court. This final comes at the right time for both of us. I'm sure we're going to have a blast.

"Knowing both of us, we're going to give everything. I've played so many epic matches against him. Of course, the one that stands out was the final in 2012. Hopefully, we don't go that long this time."

What a turnaround the past year has been for Djokovic, as he prepares to play for his third consecutive Grand Slam title.

After losing in the fourth round of last year's Australian Open, he had surgery on his right elbow. Disillusioned on the rocky road of recovery, it was not until the grass-court season in June that he rediscovered his mojo and went on to win Wimbledon in July and the US Open in September.

Djokovic pinpoints his semi-final victory at Wimbledon against Nadal as the turning point. He prevailed in five sets in a match that lasted almost 5 1/2 hours.

"Winning 10-8 against Nadal in the fifth set, that has catapulted me to a different, more confident self. It has allowed me to then excel in the months to come after that," he said.

"Nadal has historically been the greatest rival that I played against on all the surfaces. Some matches that we had against each other were a great turning point in my career. They have made me rethink my game.

"Those kind of encounters have also made me the player I am today. These are the kind of matches that you live for, the finals of Grand Slams, playing the greatest rivals at their best. What more can you ask for? This is where you want to be."

Nadal arrived in Melbourne with low expectations, having taken a hiatus from the tour after last year's US Open, where he withdrew in the semi-finals with a knee injury.

Last November, he also had ankle surgery.

Here, he is looking to keep his legs spry, his troublesome knees healthy. He is hitting more balls on the short hop, sticking closer to the baseline, volleying more.

He has also streamlined his service motion, cutting fat from his wind-up in a search for more accuracy and greater pop.

Nadal said his preparations for today would focus on his own game. "I just have to think my way. I have to keep doing the things that I am doing," he said.

"That's my feeling, just keep playing the way that I am playing and, let's see, expect to have one of those special days."

THE TIMES, LONDON, NYTIMES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AUSTRALIAN OPEN
Day 14: Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, noon & 4pm

Stringing rackets with a spring in his step

PROUD TO BE PROFESSIONAL

I felt fortunate to represent our country and I felt proud stringing every single racket. Every job I had, I gave my 100 per cent. It didn't matter whether it was the racket of a qualifier or a top-ranked player.

MELVIN TAN, on being the only Singaporean in the Yonex racket-stringing team at the Australian Open.

Laura Chia

Melvin Tan has been a fan of Roger Federer since 2001, but he found himself rooting for the Swiss great's Australian Open first-round opponent Denis Istomin last week.

The only Singaporean in the Yonex racket-stringing team at the first Grand Slam of the year got his first assignment upon his arrival in Melbourne on Jan 7 – and it was Istomin's racket.

"When I found out he was playing against Federer, I thought, 'Oh no, what's going to happen?'. But of course I stayed professional and committed to stringing his racket," Tan told The Sunday Times on Thursday. "As I followed the match, I ended up supporting Istomin."

He has been stringing rackets since he was 16 and this is his first Grand Slam assignment.

The 42-year-old was not due to start work on the day he arrived, but the team needed "immediate reinforcement" so he dropped his luggage at his service apartment and headed straight to Melbourne Park.

"The rackets were being checked in fast and furious by players during the qualifying rounds. And 25 rackets later, I finally ended my first day and hit the bed at 2.30am," said Tan, who strung more than 200 rackets in eight days.

"I felt fortunate to represent our country and I felt proud stringing every single racket. Every job I had, I gave my 100 per cent. It didn't matter whether it was the racket of a qualifier or a top-ranked player."

He also strung rackets for former women's world No. 1 Kim Clijsters, who partnered 2014 Australian Open champion Li Na for the legends doubles tournament, and Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas, who defeated Federer in the fourth round.

He quipped: "I did not string his (Tsitsipas') rackets for the match against Federer, so I am not to be blamed for his defeat!"

To prepare for the job, he worked out more regularly.

From exercising once a week, he started playing tennis at least thrice and going to the gym every morning.

"I knew I had to be fit because of the long hours on my feet with a lot of movement in my fingers and arms," said Tan, who owns a sports shop in Far East Shopping Centre.

His hard work paid off. Even though he had only four to five hours of sleep daily, Tan did not feel tired stringing more than 20 rackets for about 17 hours every day.

The most stressful part of the job was when he had to string for players while they were playing.

He said: "Some players needed a change in racket tension because of weather conditions. So I had to do it really fast in 12 minutes when normally I take about 20 minutes."

Besides aiming to return to Melbourne next year, he also wants to string at a Masters 1000 event (which ranks below the four Slams and season-ending ATP Finals) in the United States or Europe.

He added: "I hope this opens up doors for me and other Singaporeans to string at events."

claura@sph.com.sg



Singaporean Melvin Tan helped string more than 200 rackets as part of the Yonex racket-stringing team at the Australian Open in Melbourne. PHOTO: YONEX

EXPECTATIONS HIGH FOR HIGUAIN

Zola tips on-loan striker to be an instant hit for Chelsea; believes team will help him get goals

LONDON • Chelsea assistant manager Gianfranco Zola has backed Gonzalo Higuain to make an instant impact at Stamford Bridge as the Argentinian striker prepares for his Chelsea debut.

Higuain joined the club on loan from Juventus last Thursday and could make his first appearance for the Blues in the FA Cup fourth-round tie against Sheffield Wednesday today.

"There are players who need to be rested and it could be an opportunity," Zola told reporters on Friday.

The 31-year-old was at Stamford Bridge for Chelsea's League Cup semi-final win over Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, but had not completed his move in time to be registered for that match.

If Higuain does start against second-tier Wednesday at the Bridge, he would likely take the place of Olivier Giroud, who has scored just once in his last 12 appearances.

Giroud and Spaniard Alvaro Morata have both struggled so badly this season that Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri made Higuain his top target in the January transfer window.

Zola expects the former Real Madrid star, who spent the first half of this season on loan at AC Milan, to get up to speed quickly in his first taste of English football.

"We're talking about a player who has scored not only in Italy but everywhere, also in the Champions League," Zola added.

"I'm sure he can handle expectations. He's always produced good numbers wherever he's been. We're going to help Higuain to get his goals."

Higuain thrived during his time playing for Sarri at Napoli, scoring a Serie A record 36 goals in 2015-16.

He also played with Chelsea midfielder Jorginho at Napoli and Zola hopes that extra familiarity will play a role in helping Higuain slot into the team.

"It's a system he knows very well, so this is a big advantage. The type of players will help him to do what he does best," Zola said.

"The conditions are good. There is no problem there."

While Chelsea have added a new striker, the injury woes up front for their London rivals Tottenham could force the club to return to the transfer market.

Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino had expected the club to sit out the current transfer period as they budget for the cost of their long-delayed new stadium.

But Tottenham, who face Crystal Palace in the FA Cup fourth round today, have been rocked by injuries to Harry Kane and Dele Alli, with the duo ruled out until March.

Adding to Pochettino's frustration, Moussa Sissoko and Ben Davies also suffered injuries against Chelsea.

Asked whether there was a chance of making a signing before Thursday's transfer deadline, Pochettino said: "Always, we'll see. Still six days. We are working. We have a few options.

"We are always hoping to try to add quality and try to improve the squad. We are open (to make a move) like always. Different options. In England, outside of England."

Tottenham's problems eased a little on Friday when South Korea were knocked out of the Asian Cup by Qatar, meaning Son Heung-min will be back with the team earlier than expected.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CRYSTAL PALACE V TOTTENHAM
Singtel TV Ch111, 11.55pm

CHELSEA V SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY
Ch111, tomorrow, 2am



Thierry Henry lasted three months and won just five of 20 games before Monaco terminated his contract on Friday. The former Arsenal striker has only himself to blame as stories leaked of him losing the dressing room after mocking players in front of their teammates and banishing senior players to train with the reserves. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

HeartOfFootball

Henry pays price for ill transition from punditry to coaching



Rob Hughes

At the peak of his powers, Thierry Henry combined the grace and speed of a gazelle with the finish of a sniper. His 228 goals in 377 games for Arsenal between 1999 and 2007 will probably stand forever.

But, as a manager, he has made the same basic error that Gary Neville did at Peter Lim's Valencia four years ago.

Going straight from the TV studio into managing first-division clubs was beyond their coaching acumen.

They, and the directors who appointed them, were presumptuous in thinking that esteemed playing careers followed immediately by their readiness to analyse and criticise on air, gave them an authority that could translate overnight into managerial authority.

Neville's Valencia won 10 games out of 28 before he was "relieved" of his duties.

Henry lasted three months and won five of 20 games before Monaco terminated his contract on Friday, and reappointed the previous manager Leonardo Jardim who had been fired last October to accommodate him.

Embarrassment and rather a lot of compensation all round.

Neville was able to retreat swiftly back to the Sky television team where he has lost none of his critical cutting edge. Henry may indeed find his way back into the same fold, once the reported £8.4 million (S$15 million) on his three-year Monaco contract is paid in full.

Jose Mourinho is a specialist in profiting from failure but, as he reminds us (often), he has a considerable reputation as a managerial trophy hunter. Neville and Henry leapfrogged all that nonsense by becoming celebrity managerial appointments.

But what an odd and injudicious way to run a football club Monaco look at this moment.

Down in the south of France, in the self-declared Monegasque tax haven, the club now owned by Russians had purchased and blown an almost surreal period of success.

Under the Portuguese coach Jardim and, with the wheeling and dealing of that ubiquitous Portuguese agent Jorge Mendes, Monaco won the French league and reached the semi-finals of the Champions League in 2017.

But that team were quickly sold off. Kylian Mbappe, Bernardo Silva, Benjamin Mendy went in one window, then Fabinho, Thomas Lemar and Joao Moutinho in the next.

Jose Mourinho is a specialist in profiting from failure but he has a considerable reputation as a managerial trophy hunter. Neville and Henry leapfrogged all that nonsense by becoming celebrity managerial appointments.

In all, 11 players were sold for €530 million (S$818 million). It was probably for the players' ambition to join Europe's elite clubs as much as the profit that the owner Dmitry Rybolovlev banked.

But anyway, coach Jardim paid the price, although his compensation paid the rent to keep him in one of the world's most expensive cities while he waited for another managerial job.

Who knows, Jardim may even have sensed that his club's gamble on Henry was as fickle as throwing chips at the famous Monte Carlo casino wheel.

And remember, Jardim's agent is Mendes. He guides the careers of Cristiano Ronaldo and about a billion dollars worth of others. And Mendes enjoys extraordinary influence over clubs from Valencia to Real Madrid, from St Petersburg to Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Last month, the agent offered Jardim to AC Milan as manager. Last week, he was renegotiating his client Jardim back into the Monaco hot seat.

How did that happen so fast, so apparently farcical?

Henry did not help his own situation. For such an elegant mover, such a proven opportunist, he appeared guileless in management.

He briefly coached Arsenal's youth team under Arsene Wenger, the coach who started the striker's career at Monaco. And he was employed by Belgian national team manager Roberto Martinez to work on player morale in the build-up to Belgium's successful World Cup campaign last year.

But keeping the spirit of bonhomie going among the likes of Eden Hazard and Romelu Lukaku during a tournament is far from the responsibility of building a team on a permanent basis.

Stories leaked of Henry humiliating players, almost as if he was Mourinho already. He mocked players in front of their teammates. Monaco backed him to sign his old Arsenal buddy Cesc Fabregas, and other players this month.

Yet they couldn't turn losses into victories. Last weekend, Monaco succumbed 5-1 at home to Strasbourg before being humbled 3-1 by second-tier Metz in the French Cup on Tuesday.

Worse, Henry was picked up on TV microphones calling a Strasbourg player a derogatory name. The one thing you do not do is bring a club into disrepute in its own Principality.

He was losing the dressing room after banishing senior players to train with the reserves. Those players went upstairs to complain.

Henry was suspended on Thursday and fired on Friday after Jardim agreed terms. Some blame player power; others say that Henry simply never put in the work to make the transition from player to manager.

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Messi calls for search to continue for missing Sala

BARCELONA • Lionel Messi on Friday urged investigators to resume the search for missing striker Emiliano Sala, after police called off rescue operations and admitted the chances of finding him were "extremely remote".

Police from Guernsey abandoned the search on Thursday, after the light aircraft taking the Argentinian to Wales following his signing with Cardiff from Ligue 1 side Nantes disappeared from radar near the British island on Monday.

"While there is the possibility, a shred of hope, we ask that you please #NoDejenDeBuscar (don't stop searching) for Emiliano. All my strength to your family and friends," said the Barcelona striker on Instagram, with the hashtag #PRAYFORSALA.

His plea comes after Sala's father and other players, including Manchester City's Sergio Aguero, begged authorities to continue.

Sala's family have also asked Nantes not to commemorate the 28-year-old at today's French Cup clash with third-tier Entente Sannois Saint-Gratien.

"We ask you to respect the family who absolutely refuse to talk about mourning and ask us to keep believing," Nantes captain Valentin Rongier told more than 300 fans who attended an open training session on Thursday.

"It is for this reason that we are not going to have a minute's silence or a minute's applause because we still have hope."

Sala's sister, Romina, also vowed that she would never stop looking for her brother, before thanking Messi for his support.

She told a press conference in Cardiff on Friday: "He is a fighter. All he wanted was to play football and fulfil his dream. We are not going to stop looking, we are never going to stop." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ikhsan opens account for new club

David Lee

Ikhsan Fandi took all of two minutes to net his first goal for his new club, Raufoss IL, and helped them beat Elverum Fotball 6-1 early yesterday morning (Singapore time) at the Raufoss Storhall indoor arena in Norway.

The 19-year-old, who became the first Lion to join a European team in 30 years when he signed a two-year deal with the Norwegian second-tier side earlier this month, was brought on with fellow forward Thierry Dabove in the 59th minute of a pre-season friendly against the third-tier opponents.

The duo combined to deadly effect shortly after, when Dabove's shot was parried by former Raufoss goalkeeper Andreas Heggen, only for Ikhsan to show his predatory instincts by beating two defenders to thump the loose ball home with his right foot inside the six-yard box and make it 3-1 for Raufoss.

The new Raufoss No. 18 also displayed his willingness to run at the defence before he recorded his first assist by picking out Ryan Doghman with a through ball in the 84th minute to increase the lead to 5-1.

Ikhsan told The Sunday Times: "I'm glad I got the first goal out of the way quickly, but there are always things to improve on.

"The coaches were happy with my 30-minute performance. I just wanted to express myself and show the people here I can play football.

"But this is only a friendly and I still have to improve my fitness. I also want to link up play better and make more runs behind defences to create trouble for the opponents and opportunities for my team."

Raufoss and Ikhsan will face a sterner test when they continue their pre-season preparations with a friendly against top-division club Odds Ballklubb on Thursday.

They will kick off the new season at Nest-Sotra on March 31.

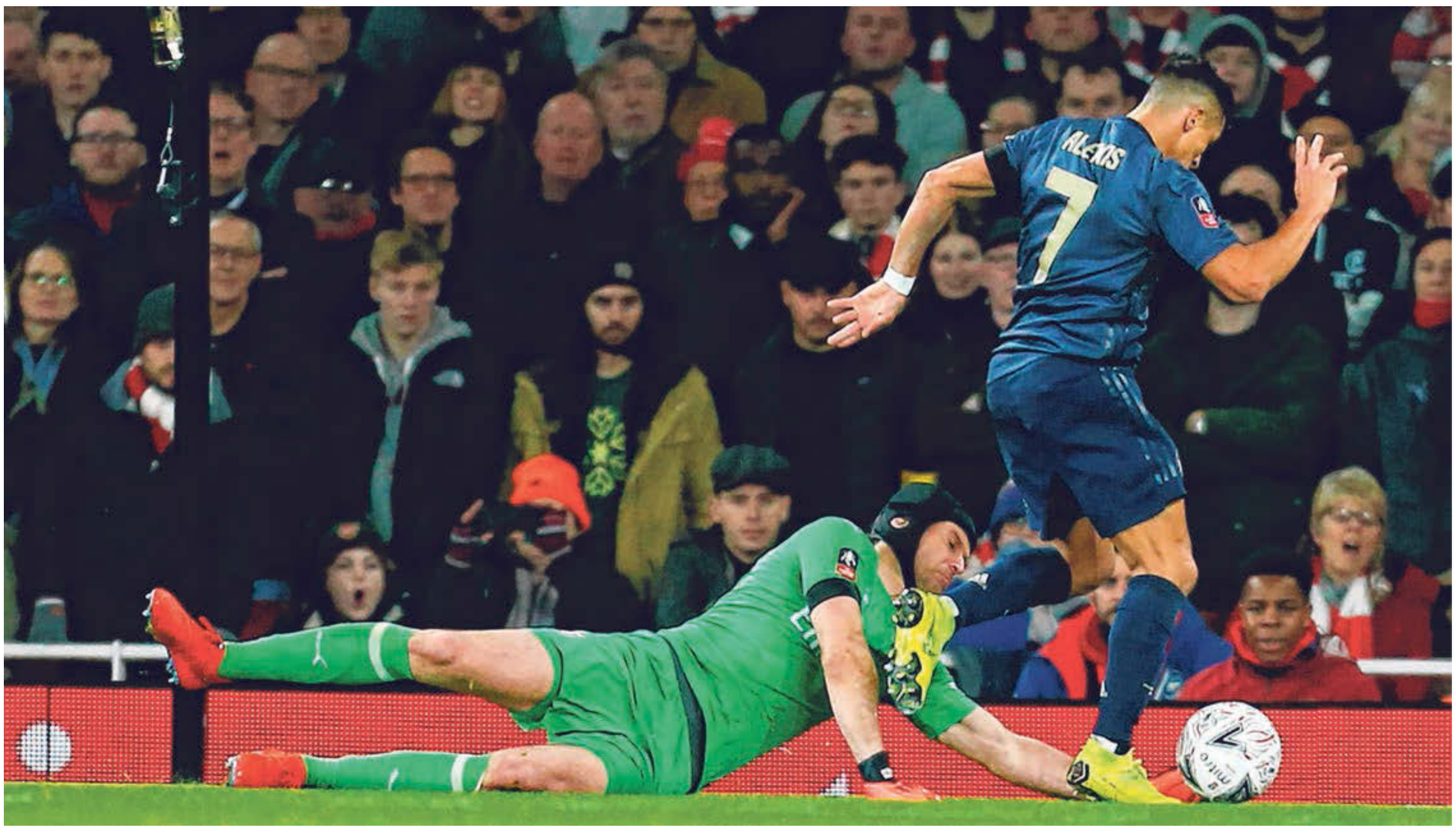
Meanwhile, 2014 S.League Coach of the Year Marko Kraljevic has left Balestier Khalsa to join Malaysian Premier League's Kelantan on a two-year deal.

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LOOKING TO IMPROVE

I just wanted to express myself and show the people here I can play football. But this is only a friendly and I still have to improve my fitness.

IKHSAN FANDI, who got his first goal for his new club, Raufoss IL, yesterday.



Manchester United forward Alexis Sanchez takes the ball around Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech before scoring the opening goal in the 3-1 FA Cup fourth-round victory at the Emirates Stadium on Friday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

'CLASSIC' UNITED BACK TO GOOD OLE DAYS

Solskjaer hails 'massive step forward' after win over Arsenal, tips Sanchez to improve

LONDON • By now, it has become a familiar sight: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer hugging his staff, applauding his players and celebrating a goal.

Quick, incisive football, willing to take on anyone and, up till now, always coming out on top.

The caretaker manager continues to revive Manchester United in spectacular fashion after Friday's 3-1 FA Cup fourth-round win at Arsenal.

Once again, he set the right mood. Once again, he got the tactics right. Once again, he got his starting line-up and substitutions right.

This was their eighth straight win since the Norwegian was appointed and the case for him taking over permanently is building, particularly now his restorative qualities appear to stretch to Alexis Sanchez, who scored the opening goal on his return to his former club.

A lesser team would have wilted in the face of some concerted pressure from the Gunners.

But United have rejuvenated, epitomised by the transformation of Victor Lindelof in the heart of defence, Paul Pogba in midfield and the deadly attacking trio of Jesse Lingard, Anthony Martial and Marcus Rashford.

Solskjaer was once part of the best counter-attacking side in English football. He seems to be building the modern team the same way and United's second and third goals, converted by Lingard and Martial, were reminders of the past when former manager Alex Ferguson led the team into battle with Arsenal.

Solskjaer was proud of his team's "classic" display, reminiscent of the good old days.

"I've had a (selection) headache since I came because the squad is full of good players," he said.

"Today, we looked more like a proper team. We looked more structured. We'd worked hard at defending and counter-attacking.

"Counter-attacking is classic Manchester United – Wayne Rooney, Cristiano Ronaldo, Park Ji-sung – we've scored so many at Arsenal over the years.

"It was a massive step forward today. At Tottenham, we hung in and (goalkeeper) David de Gea saved us but, today, our structure was miles better."

On Friday's evidence, Solskjaer seems to have the handy managerial knack of knowing exactly when to shuffle his plethora of attacking options. In-form Rashford and Martial were kept on the bench for 72 minutes, with Sanchez and Romelu Lukaku starting out wide and Lingard in the centre.

Any eyebrows raised at his decision to field striker Lukaku on the right were soon lowered. The Belgian was exceptional, creating both goals scored by Sanchez and Lingard in the first half.

When Arsenal started to fight back late after the break, in came the speedy Rashford and Martial with the aim of exploiting the space left behind in defence when the Gunners tried to go forward.

The counter-attacking plan worked a treat, with Martial sealing the win in the 82nd minute.

And Solskjaer insists Sanchez can only improve after scoring on his Arsenal return.

He said: "Every player, the more confident you get, the more you want to get on the pitch and train and work on yourself and you trust yourself. He has been injured lately so it was great to see him get 65-70 minutes tonight and he can only improve and I think he knows that himself."

Arsenal's loss was made more painful with Sokratis Papastathopoulos and Laurent Koscielny joining the injury list.

"They were clinical today," said Arsenal manager Unai Emery.

"We played against a United side in their best moment of the season and they have a lot of players to make a difference." THE GUARDIAN, THE TIMES, LONDON, REUTERS

8

Consecutive wins Manchester United have registered in all competitions for the first time since January 2017.

Ringing in the fifth round



Striker Gabriel Jesus celebrating his 23rd-minute opener for Manchester City against Burnley in the FA Cup fourth round yesterday. The floodgates opened in the second half for the hosts, who completed the 5-0 win through Bernardo Silva, Kevin de Bruyne, a Kevin Long own goal and Sergio Aguero. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ENGLISH FA CUP 4TH RD

SELECTED FIXTURES

YESTERDAY

Accrington 0 Derby 1

Man City 5 Burnley 0

Newcastle 0 Watford 2

Shrewsbury 2 Wolves 2

Millwall v Everton
Late kick-off

TODAY

Crystal Palace v Tottenham
Singtel TV Ch111, 11.55pm

Chelsea v Sheffield Wednesday
Ch111, tomorrow, 2am

SportsWorld

Hosts UAE eliminate title-holders Australia

AL AIN • Australia's defence of their Asian Cup crown ended in disappointment on Friday in the quarter-finals when a goal from Ali Mabkhout gave hosts the United Arab Emirates a 1-0 victory.

Mabkhout (right) scored the winner in the 68th minute after an error by defender Milos Degenek put him through on goal.

The UAE progress to the semi-finals against Qatar after their Arabian Gulf neighbours stunned South Korea 1-0 earlier on Friday. REUTERS

Arnautovic spurns China to stay with Hammers

LONDON • Marko Arnautovic has ended the speculation concerning his immediate future by indicating he will stay with West Ham.

The Austrian forward admitted that he had been tempted by a reported £35 million (S$62 million) bid from a Chinese club, believed to be Shanghai SIPG.

However, the footballer took to Instagram on Friday to say he wanted to "put a stop" to the speculation and help his English Premier League side West Ham win the FA Cup this season. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Olympic marathon champ's ban doubled

PARIS • Kenya's Olympic marathon champion Jemima Jelagat Sumgong has had her doping ban doubled to eight years for trying to tamper with a positive test for EPO (erythropoietin), the Athletics Integrity Unit said.

Sumgong was found to have provided "fraudulent medical information".

She had already been banned for four years for failing a test five months after winning the 2016 Olympic gold. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 27 Jan 2019				
A League	Adelaide	Central Coast	3.00pm	LW
A League	Perth Glory	Newcastle Jets	5.00pm	LW
Spanish League	Valladolid	Celta de Vigo	7.00pm	LW
Dutch League	Feyenoord	Ajax	9.30pm	LW
Italian League	Parma	SPAL	10.00pm	LW
German League	Bayern Munich	Stuttgart	10.30pm	LW
Spanish League	Girona	Barcelona	11.15pm	LW
Dutch League	Heerenveen	Alkmaar	11.45pm	LW
Mon, 28 Jan 2019				
English Cup	Crystal Palace	Tottenham	12.00am	LW
German League	Dusseldorf	RB Leipzig	1.00am	LW
Italian League	Torino	Inter	1.00am	LW
Spanish League	Athletic Bilbao	Real Betis	1.30am	LW
English Cup	Chelsea	Sheffield Wed	2.00am	LW
Italian League	Lazio	Juventus	3.30am	LW
Spanish League	Espanyol	Real Madrid	3.45am	LW

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LOTTERY

TOTO Mon, 28 Jan 2019, 6.30pm Draw No. 3444/2019

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Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

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HARDEN STEPS UP IN DEFENCE

Free-scoring guard limited to 35pts, but late stop helps Rockets secure win over Raptors

HOUSTON (Texas) • James Harden has been such an offensive threat for the Houston Rockets this National Basketball Association (NBA) season that there were eyebrows raised when he scored a "quiet" 35 points on Friday night.

Toronto Raptors coach Nick Nurse's game plan to target the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player at the Toyota Centre worked in stopping the star guard from recording another 50-point game.

But what the Raptors did not expect was for him to be a rock-solid wall as well, particularly when he crucially kept out Kawhi Leonard during the final seconds.

Harden, who is averaging more than 50 points in his last five games and has now scored 30-plus points in 22 straight games, still led Houston to a 121-119 win despite not being his usual offensive self.

His stretch of 30-point games is the fourth-longest in NBA history, behind three streaks by Wilt Chamberlain of 65, 31, and 25 games.

"James gets 35, and it's like, 'Oh really, that's all he can do?'," Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni said. "But his defence is a lot better than what people give him credit for.

"He came up huge."

The Rockets (28-20) led by 11 points with 74 seconds to go but the Raptors (36-15) cut the margin to two, 121-119, with 27 seconds left.

On the final play, Leonard decided to go for a three, instead of a two-point basket which would have tied it. He shot an air ball with Harden guarding him.

"I was just trying to contest it. It was kind of sloppy, but we won and that is all that matters," Harden said.

"If I got to score a lot of points, or whatever my team needs me to do, I am going to do (it)."

According to Second Spectrum data, he allows only 0.74 points per post-up possession, which is tied for the fourth-fewest in the NBA among players who have defended at least 75 post possessions.

Fresh off a club-record 61 points in Wednesday's win over the New York Knicks, Harden was just nine of 25 from the field and two of 13 from three-point range in his lowest-scoring outing since a Jan 7 win over the Denver Nuggets.

"I wish I could have a quiet 35 points," Rockets reserve Gerald Green joked.

Harden gave credit to the Raptors defence. "Some teams allow me to score points, some teams are going to take those points away from me and I have got to facilitate. We had a great team effort," he said of the Rockets' starters, who all scored 10 points or more.

Eric Gordon scored 24, Kenneth Faried had 21 and 14 rebounds, P. J. Tucker added 18 and Austin Rivers scored 13.

Leonard, who returned after being rested for four games, scored 32 points for the Raptors, who lost their second straight game.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Rowing good times



Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (in black) pipping Singapore's Easter Rowing Club to first place in the Open men's eight at Pandan Reservoir yesterday. The race was part of the 3-Way Regatta, the first inter-club event launched by Easter and in collaboration with the Shanghai Rowing Club and the Hong Kong club. The two-day event, which involves 68 athletes from five clubs, ends today. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Rose wary despite being in control

LOS ANGELES • It may be only the halfway stage, but world No. 1 Justin Rose believes he has done a good job with his seven birdies in a six-under 66 to take a three-shot lead over Hideki Matsuyama in the Farmers Insurance Open.

While Tiger Woods posted his second straight 70 to slip 11 strokes off the pace, Rose excelled on the Torrey Pines South Course to sit atop the leaderboard on 15-under 129, matching the best 36-hole score for a PGA Tour event at the venue.

Overnight leader Jon Rahm (72) of Spain headed a trio sharing third place on 134.

"The job was done today," said the Englishman, who has hit 16 of 18 greens in regulation in each of the first two rounds.

"I think 66 is apparently the joint low score for the two days. Anytime you equal that, you know you've gone out there and you've put a good round together.

"But I won't get ahead of myself right now."

He began Friday one shot behind Rahm and got going with three birdies in a row at the fourth, fifth and sixth holes on the South Course, one of two in use over the first two days of the tournament.

After his lone bogey of the day at the seventh, he saw a birdie try at the eighth lip out, but he moved into the lead at 12 under with a two-putt birdie at the par-five ninth, then rolled in a two-footer for a birdie at the 10th.

He then birdied the par-five 13th and rolled in a 24-footer for birdie at 16th to pad his lead.

American Billy Horschel, who raced into contention with five birdies in six holes on the front nine, saw his challenge fade with three bogeys on the back nine on the way to a 68. That left him tied with Ryan Palmer (67) and Rahm.

Japanese Matsuyama's 66 effort on the South Course included an eagle from off the green at the par-five sixth.

Needing to go low after an opening 70 on the South Course, Woods settled for the same on the North.

"I just couldn't get a putt to fall," said Woods, whose eight wins at Torrey Pines include seven Farmers Insurance Opens and a memorable 2008 US Open triumph that was the last of his 14 Major titles.

"A lot of lip-outs today... It's going to have to be a low and special weekend to have a chance."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Workout a wing-win situation



Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee joined 700 other participants yesterday morning for a workout session at The Arena in Our Tampines Hub. The fitness charity event, organised by Operation Broken Wing, was raising money for the Singapore Children's Society for disenfranchised and underprivileged youths.
ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

Starting Spartans young



While there were no war cries and swords brandished, the passion and determination of these children were not diminished as they made a dash for it at yesterday's Spartan Kids Race at the National Stadium. The bubbly youngsters, aged four to 13, negotiated obstacles over 800m to 3.2km. There was also a Spartan Stadion race for adventurous adults, who have to overcome 20 obstacles over a 5km circuit. ST PHOTO: JEREMY KWAN

Weekly tweetbits



MEME-ORABLE
Reigning regular-season MVP James Harden will have to settle for one of the reserve spots in the Western All-Star team. If captain LeBron James picks him, that is.



SWEET TWEET
"30 dec. 2015, 3 years ago. we went to camp nou as fans, and watched a game of your dream club.
23 jan. 2019, today. the day that you can tell the world you're going to play for your dream club.
we're gonna live your dream."
New Barcelona signing Frenkie de Jong and his girlfriend Mikky Kiemeney making dreams come true.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA
When Manny met Floyd. Even outside the ring, courtside at a Lakers game, Mayweather can't resist aiming a few jabs at Philippine boxer Pacquiao.
WATCH: goo.gl/2CN5DT

PHOTOS: TWITTER/NBAMEMES, MANNYPACQUIAO, INSTAGRAM/MIKKYKIEMENEY

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL
ABL Singapore Slingers v Saigon Heat (4pm), Alab Pilipinas v HK Eastern (8pm) – StarHub Ch202.

FOOTBALL
English FA Cup 4th round: Crystal Palace v Tottenham (11.55pm), Chelsea v Sheffield Wednesday (tomorrow, 2am) – Singtel TV Ch111.
Spanish LaLiga Valladolid v Celta (7pm), Girona v Barcelona (11.10pm), Bilbao v Betis (tomorrow, 1.15am), Espanyol v Real Madrid (tomorrow, 3.40am) – StarHub Ch213.

GOLF
European Tour Dubai Desert Classic: Day 4 (StarHub Ch204, 4.30pm).

RUGBY
World Rugby Sevens Series Hamilton: semi-finals (10.30am) & final (1pm) – StarHub Ch202.

TENNIS
Australian Open Day 14 (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, noon & 4pm).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL
Asian Cup S-final: Iran v Japan (StarHub Ch208, 9.50pm).
Spanish LaLiga Alaves v Rayo (StarHub Ch213, Tuesday, 3.55am).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, go to singteltv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Fitness

HotBods

Text and pictures by Ng Sor Luan



Nelson Wong, 34
Product marketing manager

Height: 1.75m **Weight:** 68kg

Exercise regimen: I do a short-tempo run twice a week and a long run over the weekend. I also go to the gym to strength train for upper and lower body 2-3 times weekly. Introducing high-intensity interval training (HIIT) to my workout routine has lifted my fitness threshold and I am able to perform better in other sports. I believe training the core with exercises such as mason twist and crunchy frog can help to correct posture imbalance and prevent injuries. I also set aside one core-condition workout day.

Diet: I don't really go on diets, but I do practise eating clean. I try to avoid fried food, fatty food and sugary drinks. I eat 5-6 small meals a day and eat in moderation, ensuring that I am only 70 per cent full each time. I normally indulge over the weekends with higher-calorie meals – I cannot say no to burgers, pizza, and pasta.



Maggie Wong, 30
HR executive

Height: 1.63m **Weight:** 52kg

Exercise regimen: I exercise about 60-90 minutes daily and I schedule different exercises, from yoga and pilates to HIIT and circuit training, for each day. I enjoy yoga as I get to work on endurance and flexibility. Pilates and other core exercises help to improve my core strength. The two HIIT and circuit classes a week allow me to train on my strength and agility and increase my metabolic conditioning.

Diet: I try to pack lunch to work at least three times a week. These are usually grain bowls or yoghurt bowls. For my grain bowls, I include ingredients such as green beans, quinoa, sweet potatoes, beef stew, salmon, avocado, coconut, and pistachios. My yoghurt bowls usually consist of 2-3 cups of yoghurt with overnight chia pudding, oats, and at least three types of fruits and nuts. My workspace has a lot of healthy snacks so it helps when I'm hungry in between meals at work. I have home-cooked food for dinners. Weekends are usually cheat days as I believe there is no motivation if I have to eat clean every day. Wine and snacks such as chocolate and cookies are my guilty pleasures.

SCAN AND WATCH
Hot bods videos and more:
instagram.com/straits_times



Flight yoga master trainer Katy Yoon leading Singapore's first instructor training course last Sunday. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

NEW WORKOUT MIXES YOGA, DANCE, WEIGHTS

Called Flight, it aids both muscle training and weight loss, and is set to electronic dance music

Laura Chia

Beatfactory Fitness co-founder Ash Ali had always wanted to try yoga but thought it was too zen for him.

"Yoga is not effective for me because my mind is constantly active. I'll start thinking about food, thinking about work. My mind can never rest. I will just sleep in class," said the 35-year-old.

But, last Sunday, he participated in an hour-long Flight EDM yoga class, which he described as perfect for him.

Flight, founded by American fitness instructor Sydney Benner in 2016, combines dance, yoga and functional fitness, such as doing squats while carrying weights, with electronic dance music (EDM) in the background.

During the session, participants did dance, weights and yoga in intervals of about 10 minutes each.

Said Ali: "This is perfect because I like beats and I get to do yoga."

The class was part of a seven-hour long Flight instructor training course held in Singapore for the first time. Both were conducted by master trainer Katy Yoon.

Yoon, who has been conducting Flight classes since 2016, said Flight is appealing as it encompasses different types of exercises.

"Some people tell me that ordinary yoga is boring, others want to do muscle training but think it's boring to do by themselves," said South Korean Yoon, who has been a fitness instructor for over 16 years and teaches dance, Zumba and yoga.

"Here we put all those things in one session so I think this can satisfy everyone's workout goals."

Five people, including Ali, signed up for the instructor training course, which included a theory session and a study of the movements in detail.

Four more joined them for the Flight master class. Among them was Mary Goh, who attends yoga classes once a week.

"I've never perspired so much before, but I feel more energised and alert now," said the 67-year-old.

"This is a good change from normal yoga. The intensity is greater and, with the music, there's more motivation.

"It's good exercise for old people because you can do it at your own pace."

Ali wants to bring Flight to Beatfactory Fitness because it appeals to the masses. He added that it would take at least two more months to develop the programme.

"We have to start somewhere in Singapore, especially now that the market is saturated. This is like HIIT (high-intensity interval training), which is the fastest way to lose weight, so it's suitable for any age group," he said.

"Some people might be bored of mainstream programmes and want to try something new. They may think yoga is too boring and dance is too intense so this is perfect."

claura@sph.com.sg

A PERFECT MIX

This is perfect because I like beats and I get to do yoga.

ASH ALI, Beatfactory Fitness co-founder, on Flight's inventive combination of dance, yoga and functional fitness with electronic dance music.

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What's trending for travel in the US and beyond



Lee Siew Hua
Travel Writer, The Straits Times



Richard Launder
President and CEO of Destination America and Director of The Travel Corporation USA

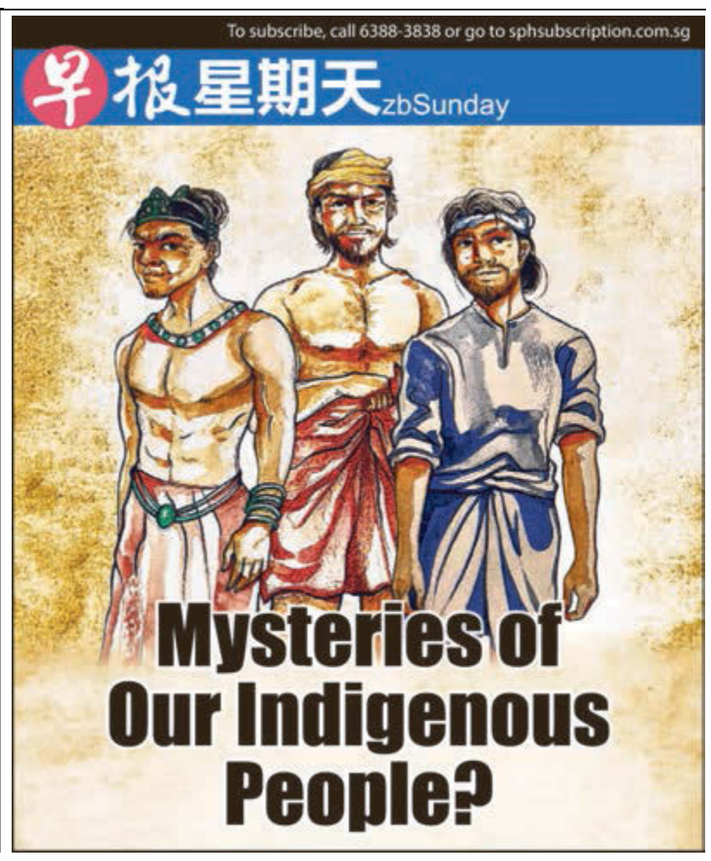
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Insight



Invest

Confused about CPF payout age? All you need to know B16

B



Beyond the bicentennial

The marking of 200 years since Raffles' landing has drawn mixed responses. Insight examines how it has become a springboard to look at Singapore's deeper past stretching back 700 years and more. B3-8

Pioneers (from left): Tan Tock Seng, Munsyi Abdullah, Sir Stamford Raffles, Naraina Pillai and Sang Nila Utama along the Singapore River.

IT CHANGED MY LIFE
Violence cost him his marriage B2



OLIVIA HO
I think of myself as the anti-Marie Kondo B9



KISHORE MAHBUBHANI
Is US-China war inevitable? B10



PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO, NG SOR LUAN, AFP DESIGN: CHNG CHOON HIONG

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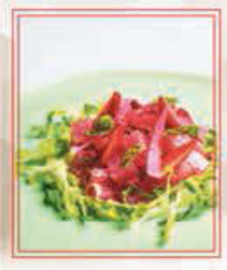
Gusto Italiano February

The Cuisine of Chef Lino Sauro with Frescobaldi Wines



21 February 2019, Thursday
7.00pm (Reception) | 7.30pm (Dinner)
Gattopardo Ristorante di Mare
34 Tras St, Singapore 079026
$128.80++ (HSBC Cardholders)
$161++ (Other payment modes)
Dress Code: Smart Casual





Born in Sicily of Southern Italy to a lineage of farmers, Chef-Owner of Gattopardo Ristorante di Mare, Lino Sauro grew up helping in his family farms which instilled in him strong values and appreciation for where his food came from. Having spent many years on the road honing his culinary skills as a chef, since he was just 15, he finally settled in Singapore in 2010 and started the acclaimed Gattopardo.
This February, treat yourself to an evening of great food and drinks featuring this specially crafted 6-course menu by Chef Lino paired with the elegant and intensely aromatic Tuscan wines from Frescobaldi. Aromatic and textured with a depth of flavour, one is sure to find a favourite amongst the wines featured this evening.





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The Sunday Times says

The art of growing the market

Singapore's art world was shaken recently by the abrupt cancellation of premier contemporary art fair Art Stage Singapore. The cancellation cannot be entirely unexpected as the fair reported steadily declining participation over the last three years. An art fair with the international ambitions of Art Stage cannot be developed in a vacuum. Regional competition has intensified in recent years with the rise of other similar fairs such as Taiwan-based Taipei Dangdai and Art Basel Hong Kong.

Collectors with the means to splash out six-figure sums on a work of art are likelier to travel straight to Art Basel or Art Miami for their needs. So an art fair here needs a strong USP – unique selling proposition – to draw their attention. The demise of Art Stage is thus a wake-up call to rethink the approach of hiring international brands as big guns in Singapore's push to become an arts hub. There are alternative strategies. Singapore has long-established advantages as a free port with enviable infrastructure that is plugged into a global network. In the past decade, the ecosystem of the arts business has also grown substantially with more international galleries opening and the establishment of ancillary businesses such as art movers Helutrans and art storage facility Le Freeport. These are strengths Singapore can capitalise on. The art fair world can learn from the Singapore International Film Festival, which built such a strong South-east Asian line-up that international film festival directors came here to programme their events.

The new S.E.A. Focus boutique art fair, with 26 galleries and talks curated by STPI – Creative Workshop and Gallery, is a step in the right direction. If it can develop strong content curation and serve as a bridge between budding South-east Asian talents and international buyers, it can build a strong niche in the same way the film festival did, and help rebuild a stronger art fair scene.

ItChangedMyLife

Don't let violence ruin your life

Lifeguard now helps other men to end physical abuse after it cost him his marriage





Mr Job Li who regrets hitting his wife in an incident a few years ago is an active volunteer at Pave, Singapore's pioneer family violence specialist centre, co-chairing counselling sessions where he shares his experiences with other men who are violent with their spouses and loved ones. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Wong Kim Hoh
Senior Writer

With his clean-shaven head, Job Li would make a believable Shaolin monk in a gongfu movie.

Sturdily built and tanned from his job as a lifeguard on Pulau Tekong, the 56-year-old looks like a man not to be trifled with.

But he's not one who thinks with his fists, he says, though he has used physical violence twice in his life.

About eight years ago, he headbutted a fault-finding superior who abused him with a shower of expletives over a minor incident. The man made a police report but Mr Li was not charged.

Five years later during a domestic squabble, he struck his second wife and left her with a swollen eye.

"We'd been married 16 years and I'd never hit her, just that once," he says remorsefully.

But that one strike cost him dearly and changed his life in more ways than he had imagined.

She took out a personal protection order (PPO) against him. The PPO also came with an order to attend a counselling programme at Pave, Singapore's pioneer family violence specialist centre.

"I thought that by going to the counselling sessions, everything would be fine at home," he says.

He thought wrong. Not long after, his wife filed for divorce.

"Violence cost me my marriage," he says.

He found himself in a deep pit, struggling with emotions ranging from rage to helplessness.

But as actor Viggo Mortensen once said in the 2008 cowboy flick Appaloosa: "Life has a way of making the foreseeable that which never happen... and the unforeseeable that which your life becomes."

The proverbial silver lining appeared, in a way Mr Li completely did not expect.

Although he didn't want to, he was coaxed into completing his counselling programme at Pave.

When that was over, he surprised himself, and the folks at Pave, when he asked to attend more sessions.

While confronting his flaws and his failings was painful, it was also liberating.

"It helped me to figure out so many things. I learn something new every session," says Mr Li, who has completed nearly 50 sessions over the last couple of years.

In fact, he is now an active volunteer at Pave, co-chairing counselling sessions where he shares his experiences with other men who are violent with their spouses and loved ones.

"Not because I have wisdom. My motivation is to let other men know how we all have blind spots, and how using violence can ruin our lives," he says.

There is a gentle lilt in Mr Li's voice, not what one would expect of a burly man.

He is the eldest of four children. His father was a carpenter who later ran a furniture shop; his mother was a housewife.

His childhood was spent in a kampung in Lorong Ah Soo, where his family lived, alongside a coterie of relatives, in one of three houses owned by his maternal grandparents.

He remembers those days with fondness although living with so many people was sometimes prickly.

"There were always excuses to squabble, while drawing water from the well to bathe, or cooking," he says in Mandarin.

Hitting the books was not his thing; he much preferred sports and running wild and free.

"Because I was so active, I was very skinny. My father actually asked me if I was a drug addict," he says with a laugh.

He wasn't. Nor was he a hoodlum although like any rambunctious teenager, he had his fair share of one-on-one fights.

"I guess I watched too many gongfu films," he says, grinning.

Although he struggled, he completed his secondary education at Macpherson Secondary.

"I went to a Chinese primary school in Parry Avenue and being transplanted into an English environment was tough," he says.

After completing his national service, he started working in his father's furniture shop in Bukit Timah.

"It was a good business in the 1980s because everybody was moving into new homes," he says.

When he was 33, he got married to a former classmate. They had reconnected at a gathering several years after they left school.

"I didn't know it but apparently she had a crush on me when we were in school," he says.

They registered their marriage to apply for a flat which came two years later. Alas, living together as a couple was not as easy as they expected and the marriage broke up barely three months after they moved into their new home.

After 13 years working for his father, Mr Li quit to try something different.

By then, he had armed himself with multiple driving licences, including one to drive a bus and taxi.

But he ended up being a lifeguard instead.

For more than 10 years until 2012, he beavered away uneventfully as a lifeguard with a sports body. Things took a different turn when he started working with a supervisor who, he claims, found fault with him at every turn.

One day, the man started cussing at him because a chair Mr Li was repairing had dirtied his clothes.

When the tirade continued after an apology, Mr Li retaliated with a headbutt.

"That was forced out of me," he says.

Although the colleague lodged both a police report and a magistrate's complaint, he did not get into any trouble.

Not long after, he found another job as a facility officer in a polytechnic.

By then, he had met and married his second wife, an auditor.

Things hummed along for the first decade. But life and its attendant complications – work pressures, communication issues, personality differences – got in the way and cracks started surfacing.

"Perhaps both of us were escapist and didn't really address the issues. It's like drawing from a bank account without topping up. One day, you find that it's empty," he says soberly.

His voice turns soft when he recalls the day he hit her during a squabble.

"Her glasses fell, the side of her eye turned red, then swollen, and she couldn't see. And I thought to myself: 'Oh s***!'"

He took her to the hospital where a staff asked his wife if she wanted to make a police report. She didn't.

The episode was a game changer. Mr Li sought counselling at a Care Services Centre where he was advised to also bring his wife along. They attended a few counselling sessions as a couple.

With a sigh, he mouths a Chinese proverb "Shan yu yu lai feng man lou" which means "the wind sweeping through the tower heralds a rising storm in the mountain".

It was a harbinger of things to come.

Not long after, he received a PPO which required him to attend 12 sessions of counselling at Pave. It hit him like a bolt.

He dutifully complied but was stunned when halfway through, he was served divorce papers.

"I was so angry. I didn't want to continue. But Siew Fong called me up and persuaded me to continue," he says, referring to Ms Soh Siew Fong, a veteran counsellor and head of casework services at Pave.

"I felt helpless. What is wrong with me? Why did both my marriages fail? After completing the 12 sessions, I realised there were lots of things I couldn't figure out. So I asked to become a volunteer and attend more sessions," he says, adding that he is grateful for a platform where men from different backgrounds could come together and talk about their failings without being judged.

Ms Soh was more than happy to have him back.

"He was very serious. He would come, take notes, go home to reflect and then come back to share his reflections," she says. "You know he has faced his demons. His heart is remorseful and the regret is sincere."

In fact, she was so struck by his earnestness that she made him a co-facilitator.

With a laugh, Ms Soh says Mr Li often articulates truths which professional counsellors can't.

"Because of what he has been through, he can say things like: "Not only are those who hit their wives not men, they are not even human.'

Mr Li, she says, is walking the talk.

"No one likes to be reminded of what they have done wrong. He's also hurting but he's willing to go through the hurt again and to hold the pain of the other men and make them think change is possible. It becomes a hopeful message for others."

The first, and longest-serving, Chinese-speaking client-turned-volunteer, Mr Li has not only inspired hope, he has also sparked change.

For more than 17 years, Mr Calvin Quah, 48, has been physically abusive towards his wife.

The delivery driver met Mr Li when he went to his first counselling session at Pave two years ago.

The two struck up a friendship, and Mr Quah would turn to his new friend for advice whenever he had any problems.

"I wanted to give up but Li encouraged me and advised me not to. He said: 'You're already here, you have to face up to your reality. You have to accept your past and start all over again."

"He helped me to feel empathy for my wife, he made me want to change," says Mr Quah whose story was featured in When Love Hurts, a collection of stories about men, women and children learning to end the violence in their lives. Produced by Pave, the book was edited by former journalist Alan John.

Inspired by Mr Li's willingness to change and share, the father of two young children did the same. He came back repeatedly to share his story after completing his programme and has since then attended nearly 40 sessions.

Ms Soh says Mr Li's actions have had a ripple effect.

"During a recent session, another man approached me and told me he too wants to become a volunteer."

Meanwhile, the lifeguard says he will continue attending sessions to help other men see their blind spots.

Asked if he has thought about marriage again, he chortles and says his role model is the late Hollywood star Elizabeth Taylor, who was married eight times, twice to fellow actor Richard Burton.

"Not because I also want to get married eight times but because like her, I will not stop believing in love."

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Choosing the path of non-violence



SCAN TO WATCH

http://str.sg/pave

• Best-selling author Alan John and a Pave team will share true stories on how they help broken families become whole again at the next meeting of The Straits Times Book Club at 7pm on Jan 30 at the Central Library. Sign up at http://str.sg/o69s

Singapore bicentennial: An island's journey



Warren Fernandez

Editor-in-Chief

ThinkingAloud

Looking back to chart way forward

Instead of angst over the bicentennial, draw lessons from the past



The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see.

So the late British prime minister and famed orator, Winston Churchill, is once supposed to have said.

This year, many will be doing so, with major milestones and anniversaries being marked around the world – 150 years since the birth of India's Mahatma Gandhi; 50 years after American astronaut Neil Armstrong's great lunar "leap for mankind"; 100 years since the May Fourth Movement in China; and 30 years after the Tiananmen Square student protests in 1989.

Singapore, too, looks likely to spend quite a bit of time casting an eye backwards, with the commemoration of the bicentennial of the landing of Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles kicking off tomorrow with an official launch by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Furthermore, the organisers behind the year-long string of events – "it's not a celebration", they insist – have also sought to put Singapore's colonial past in a wider context, tracing its history all the way back to the legend of Sang Nila Utama, the Hindu prince of the Srivijayan Empire, who is said to have landed on this island of Temasek in 1299.

Other prominent pioneers such as business leader and philanthropist Tan Tock Seng, Raffles' secretary and interpreter Munsyi Abdullah, the chief clerk at the Treasury and Indian community leader Naraina Pillai, have also been literally put on a pedestal, with statues of them being set up by the Singapore River, to highlight their contributions, alongside that of Raffles and his British peers.

This has sparked a spirited debate about the purpose and intent behind the bicentennial events, with some commentators leery of what they see as official efforts to uphold Singapore's colonial past, a period when the local people were exploited and subjugated. The criticism seems to have led to some officials tip-toeing nervously around the subject.

That, in turn, has led to a push-back. As a Straits Times reader, Mr Toh Cheng Seong, noted in a recent letter to the newspaper's Forum page: "It is very odd to call the office in charge of the celebrations of Singapore's 720-year history the Bicentennial Office. Wouldn't 'septcentennial' be a better approximation of the period under coverage for the festivities?

"Or was this extended historical framing a mere reaction to criticism that the office was glorifying colonial imperialism, and that we should instead look further back at the time when local affairs were managed by the locals, never mind the fact that most of them were similarly oppressed subjects of absolute rule?

"This begs the question: Was Sang Nila Utama any more local than Sir Stamford Raffles? After all, the Srivijayan prince was born and bred in Palembang, Sumatra, and not on the island which he founded as the kingdom of Singapura."

Similarly puzzled, another writer, Mr Loke Hoe Kit, turned to the country's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew for some guidance, noting how he had once said that "if Raffles had not come here in 1819 to establish a trading post, my great-grandfather would not have migrated to Singapore".

Mr Loke added: "Mr Lee wisely avoided the virulent brand of anti-colonialism espoused by other former colonies that ultimately sent international investors packing. His government recognised history for what it was, and had no desire to rewrite the past by renaming streets or removing monuments.

"Hence, it is odd that Singapore should now be so reticent about celebrating its bicentennial."

A POST-COLONIAL FUNK?

I agree. It does strike me as strange indeed that more than 50 years after Independence, some Singaporeans might now find themselves in a belated post-colonial funk.

One would have thought that the Republic's success over the past five decades – with even today's British leaders extolling its economic transformation as a model for their country, post-Brexit – would have imbued Singaporeans, especially younger ones, with a greater sense of their promise and potential, rendering any lingering colonial hang-ups as pointless as it is passe.

To those who still harbour doubts, I would offer the wise words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the former American first lady who once said, eloquently: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

So, to my mind, Singaporeans need not be angst-ridden about marking the bicentennial, as if doing so implies revelling in the past subjugation of their forebears. Rather than hailing its colonial masters, the whole point of the exercise, it seems to me, is for people to draw the right lessons from the past 200 years, to help set them up for the future.

To do so requires an appreciation of what transpired in 1819 and the years thereafter. A gripping account of this is found in the book Singapore 1819: A Living Legacy, by sociologist Kennie Ting, who is the director of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

"Singapore's success lay in the very beginning in Raffles' shrewd strategy to declare it a free port," he notes.

The approach at the time, taken by the Dutch and others, was to restrict trade strictly to vessels from their country, or to slap punitive tariffs on others for the privilege of selling their goods in local markets (sound familiar?).

Singapore under Raffles went the other way, he adds, noting: "Raffles waived customs and other duties for any trading vessels wishing to trade in Singapore.

"The principle was freedom to trade: any vessel from anywhere in the world, should have equal opportunity to trade their wares within the confines of this particular harbour, as long as there was a market for their goods. This laissez faire approach gave Singapore a huge competitive edge almost immediately, as it became the cheapest port to dock at overnight.

"Word spread and within three years, Singapore had begun to corner the market, with all manner of trading vessels – European ships, Chinese junks and Malay boats – particularly from Malacca – eager to dock and trade their wares in its port..."

Mr Ting continues: "On 12th January 1823, just before he left Singapore for the last time, Raffles wrote: 'The progress of my new settlement is in every way most satisfactory... Every day brings us new settlers, and Singapore has already become a great emporium. Houses and warehouses are springing up in every direction, and the inland forests are fast giving way before the industrious cultivator. I am now engaged in marking out the towns and roads, and in establishing laws and regulations for the protection of person and property. We have no less than nine mercantile houses (European) and there is abundant employment for capital as fast as it accumulates'."

Barely five years after 1819, Singapore had become home to 10,683 residents: 4,580 Malays, 3,317 Chinese, 1,925 Bugis, 756 from India, 74 Europeans, 16 Armenians and 15 Arabs. By the turn of the century, the population would swell further to about 300,000, as more immigrants made their way here, seeking a better future for themselves and their families.

Personally, I can't help but be grateful it all happened this way, for otherwise, my father's Indian ancestors would probably not have ventured to this island, nor my mother's from the Netherlands, and their offspring born here would never have had the chance to meet and bear "uniquely Singaporean" children, including me. This is very much a part of the Singapore story for many Singaporeans today.

So, for me, the lessons to be drawn from the bicentennial events seem to be these. First and foremost, they remind us all how Singapore's fortunes have ebbed and flowed through the ages, with prosperity and success neither preordained nor naturally enduring.

Second, the critical importance of Singapore being connected with, and staying open to, the world, trading freely in goods, capital, people and ideas. Our commitment to welcoming people and talent from everywhere, affording them opportunities to seek their fortunes here, helped set the stage for the multi-racial and meritocratic society that Mr Lee and the pioneer generation of leaders, together with their supporters, helped forge over the years.

Thirdly, whether intended or otherwise, the British left Singapore a few precious gifts – the rule of law, sound systems of civil administrations and governance and, most importantly, the English language, which has served as a glue to bind the disparate peoples who came here into one united people – more so and more quickly than anyone imagined possible – while also enabling us to plug and play in today's modern world.

Thankfully, our founding fathers had the good sense to make use of these assets, rather than spurn them in a fit of post-colonial petulance and pique; we, the beneficiaries, should strive to be no less wise.

As I see it, no Singaporean today needs or wants to glorify the country's colonial past. But nor do we need a puerile pretence of rejecting what we inherited, if only to prove our commitment to this fledgling Republic we call our own. Far better for us to look back with equanimity, and draw the right lessons from the past, so that we are better able to chart our way forward.

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Singapore bicentennial: An island's journey

WHY 2019 IS HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The arrival of the British in 1819 set in motion Singapore's development into a trading port and modern metropolis. Insight looks at the significance of the bicentennial, and how it marks a chance to more fully appreciate Singapore's rich history before then.

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community Correspondent

To some Singaporeans, the bicentennial – which marks the 200th anniversary of the British arrival – does not make much sense to them.

Twenty-six-year-old Michael Chen, who works in the petrochemical industry, laments: "I don't understand why we are celebrating something that predates our modern history as the Republic of Singapore.

"Post-1965 matters to me more than anything before that."

Coming just four years after Singapore celebrated SG50 – marking 50 years of independence after leaving the Federation of Malaya and before that, the British empire – it is understandable that Singaporeans might be confused about the latest bout of flag-waving, the bicentennial.

For it was on Feb 6, 1819, that Sir Stamford Raffles signed a treaty allowing him to set up a trading post on the strategically located island known as Singapura at the end of the Malay peninsula, on behalf of the British East India Company, a company set up to exploit trade with East and South-east Asia and India.

And now, a specially set up Singapore Bicentennial Office has, together with community groups, arranged a year of activities to commemorate what is regarded as the founding of modern Singapore.

Organisers are at pains to note it is not a celebration, however. The office says it wants to be "responsible to history" and address elements that may not be always positive.

Still, hot on the heels of the SG50 golden jubilee marking the founding of Singapore – the independent one – there is the bicentennial for the founding of another Singapore – the British mercantile one.

Some millennials, whose school syllabus mostly focuses on two dates – 1819 and 1965 – might wonder: What relevance does marking 200 years since the British arrived have today for Singaporeans?

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his speech announcing the bicentennial year activities, gave a pointer, saying 1819 marked a turning point: "Because of Raffles, Singapore became a British colony, a free port, and a modern city." But he also called on Singaporeans to "understand truly how far back our history reaches, and how complex it is".

Indeed, the Sejarah Melayu, or Malay Annals, documents that a prince from Palembang, Sang Nila Utama, landed here back in 1299. And the official Singapore Bicentennial logo reflects this long history, comprising seven red poly-shapes, each representing one century.

Historian Peter Borschberg hopes that through the bicentennial, Singaporeans become better aware of the island's longer history: "The island has gone through oscillating fortunes over the past seven centuries. And when you look at the big picture, 1819 isn't really the start of a new story, but the beginning of a new chapter, or even just a new paragraph in a story that is still being written."





Scenes from The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning Centre will include a depiction of Raffles and his crew (above) approaching Singapore in 1819; and Singapore as a trading port in the early 1900s (left).
PHOTOS: SINGAPORE BICENTENNIAL OFFICE AND PARTNERS

HOW SINGAPORE CAME UNDER BRITISH CONTROL

Raffles was not the only one with the foresight and vision to set up a British post at the end of the strait, as the engraving on the plinth of his statue by the Singapore River so proudly proclaims.

Major William Farquhar had earlier urged his employers, the British East India Company, to establish one, and it was a confluence of circumstances that led Raffles – who was racing against the Dutch to stake a claim in the area – to Singapore in 1819.

A fleet of eight ships with Raffles and Farquhar on board first landed at the nearby Karimun islands, which proved too rocky and inhospitable. Captain Daniel Ross, who had previously seen Singapore in passing, suggested heading there.

Already living there were about 1,000 people, including local chieftain Temenggong Abdul Rahman of Johor and his entourage. Most of the population were indigenous people, with about 20 to 30 Chinese. Most grew fruit, fished and foraged in the jungle. They took part in trading as well.

Raffles was relieved that the Dutch, who had a stranglehold on the region's key ports and spice trade sea lanes, were not present.

To set up a free trading post, Raffles worked with the Temenggong and Sultan Hussein Shah of Johor. A treaty was signed on Feb 6, 1819, which split control over Singapore among the three parties. The British had to pay the Temenggong and Sultan an annual stipend of 3,000 and 5,000 Spanish dollars respectively.

This 1819 treaty did not give Raffles the outcome he wanted, as it amounted to little more than permission to erect a storehouse where the British could keep goods and undertake trade.

In the end, the Dutch agreed not to launch a claim on Singapore. Subsequently, the Sultan and the Temenggong agreed to sell Singapore to the British East India Company. In 1824, a new Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the two Malay leaders and the British replaced the 1819 treaty. The Sultan and Temenggong received a lump sum as part of the deal.

This resulted in Singapore and its surrounding islands being ceded to the East India Company. In 1826, Singapore became part of the Straits Settlements, which included Penang and Malacca. It came under the administration of the East India Company's Indian arm.

Raffles made only three visits to Singapore before he died in 1826 and historians in more recent times credit a broader cast of characters for the development of early Singapore. Texts such as Singapore, A 700-year History: From Early Emporium To World City attribute Sultan Hussein's role as essential in forming the basis for the treaty to start a settlement.

They also recognise Farquhar, who was installed as First British Resident and Commandant of Singapore, as the one who got the settlement up and running – aided by his sense of cultural awareness and familiarity with Malay leaders and peoples from his time as Commandant of Malacca. His successor, John Crawfurd, introduced a legal system and secured investments by traders and immigrants.

The East India Company was reluctant to develop Singapore further and it fell into economic decline. Some historians argue that it was the merchant community's successful lobbying for the transfer of the colony from a dependency of the Indian government into a crown colony that kick-started a new phase of Singapore's development after 1867.

This was boosted by the opening of the Suez Canal, a telegraph line to Singapore, the importance of rubber for coating telegraph wires, the suppression of piracy and the invention of the steamship.

WHY IT MATTERS

People should care about this chapter of the past – not to pay homage to the colonists but to recognise 1819 as relevant today for triggering the coming together of Singaporeans' forebears as an internationally connected colonial port city, say those in the heritage community, such as heritage blogger Jerome Lim.

Five years after that 1819 date, Singapore had become home to 10,683 residents: 4,580 Malays, 3,317 Chinese, 1,925 Bugis, 756 from India, 74 Europeans, 16 Armenians and 15 Arabs.

It was becoming a port city, plugged into an international maritime trading system, helped by the fact that the British navy secured the waters beyond its shores.

By the late 1800s, Singapore was a kaleidoscope of peoples who had brought with them their own worldviews, skills, practices and religions. The port city was also a centre for pilgrimage, culture and politics, note historians Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, and a local experience began to emerge from these wide-ranging influences.

The bicentennial is an opportunity for public reflection and discussion on the portrayal of those involved in making a success of the colonial endeavour, says archaeologist John Miksic. These include Farquhar, local rulers, Chinese merchants, Arab and Bugis traders, community pioneers as well as other contributors.

By the 1910s, the population had grown to more than 300,000. In all, the island before World War II had more or less thrived for about 120 years.

Surely, such a significant episode in the country's past is worth re-examining, especially in the context of Singapore's existing relationship with remnants from colonial times, declares the heritage community.

Those "remnants" include the civic district, with its colonial footprint, for example. Still functional colonial-era infrastructure such as roads wind around British-commissioned institutions and bridges, most of which have been repurposed into the Republic's main attractions. There, the collective memories of generations of Singaporeans also pulsate.

The island has also inherited the British's trading port legacy, as well as legal and political frameworks. How aware are Singaporeans of this colonial-era heritage that is part of everyday life? What is rejected, kept or built upon further?

For instance, should Singapore continue to rely on Cambridge Assessment to mark its students' examination scripts, when graders in the United Kingdom occasionally lose the scripts? Or is this arrangement worth retaining?

The colonialists' legacy must be weighed against the negatives, including divisive racial policies, the subjugation and humiliation of communities and their cultures, suspension of civil rights, the erasure and even destruction of histories (blasting the Singapore Stone), and their failure to defend the island against the Japanese in the 1940s.

Colonialism is a complex mix of processes, consequences and contradictions, notes social anthropologist Lai Ah Eng. Since the nation is marking colonial history, the "negatives" should not be avoided, she says. "We should be reflective and critical, not just celebratory, give credit where it is due but also point out some of the flaws and problems."

QUESTIONING THE NARRATIVE

Assessing the significance of 1819 requires a look back at Singapore's longer history.

Simplified accounts had entrenched misconceptions that Temasek – as it was once known – had flourished for only a fleeting moment in time, and that Raffles' party

SINGAPORE STORIES continued on B6



Far left: An artist's impression of the Victoria Concert Hall site in the 14th century depicting a busy marketplace, a small cottage industry for copper or metal work and residences.
PHOTO: LIM CHEN SIAN, AARON KAO

Left: Before the pubs and restaurants moved in, coolies along the banks of the Singapore River in 1960 looked to storytellers for entertainment.
PHOTO: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE



A view of the city skyline with the ArtScience Museum awash in light. Across Singapore, people are relooking, documenting and presenting stories and lesser-known histories this year as part of a packed bicentennial calendar. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

SINGAPORE BICENTENNIAL

Special bicentennial microsite

Go to our Singapore bicentennial microsite for reports, graphics, videos, photo galleries and more.

SCAN TO VIEW



http://str.sg/SGbicentennial

HOPES FOR THE YEAR



HOME FOR ARTEFACTS

I hope there will be more support for the analysis of the 500,000-plus artefacts that have been dug up in Singapore since 1984, and that a place will be found where they can be permanently stored, studied and exhibited.

ARCHAEOLOGIST JOHN MIKSIC



ROOM TO INVESTIGATE HISTORY

That the bicentennial activities will generate not only interest but also opportunities for everyone to investigate aspects of Singapore's histories on their own and ask questions that enrich their awareness of its complexities.

ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN HISTORIAN IMRAN TAJUDEEN



NO SIMPLE ANSWERS

The bicentennial is not a choice between 700 and 200 years. That simplifies the issue. History is rich, diverse and complex. We still have many places and institutions named after Stamford Raffles and other colonial personalities, which will remain after the bicentennial is over. What matters is how we ascribe good values and memories to these places and institutions, which will render the colonial, national and local.

HISTORIAN LOH KAH SENG

200 years in 20 objects

The past two centuries have left an imprint on everyday life in Singapore. We look at 20 objects that highlight key developments, one for each decade.



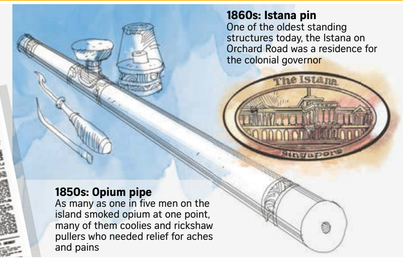
1820s: Treaty of Friendship and Alliance
This treaty signed by the East India Company with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman fully ceded sovereignty over Singapore to the British



1830s: Raffles Institution school badge
Although Thomas Stamford Raffles laid the foundation stone for a school in 1823, it was only a decade later that a functioning school was up and running on this island. The badge is a more recent addition

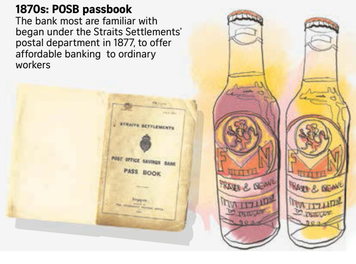


1840s: First edition of The Straits Times
It was not the first newspaper in Singapore, but The Straits Times is one of the world's oldest surviving newspapers dating back to 1845

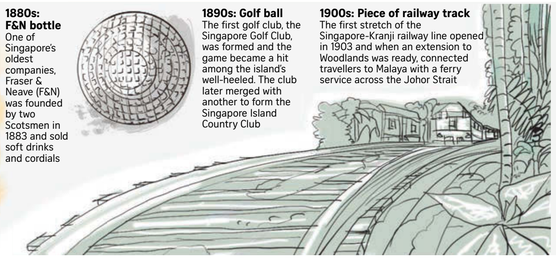


1850s: Opium pipe
As many as one in five men on the island smoked opium at one point, many of them coolies and rickshaw pullers who needed relief for aches and pains

1860s: Istana pin
One of the oldest standing structures today, the Istana on Orchard Road was a residence for the colonial governor



1870s: POSB passbook
The bank most are familiar with began under the Straits Settlements' postal department in 1877, to offer affordable banking to ordinary workers



1880s: F&N bottle
One of Singapore's oldest companies, Fraser & Neave (F&N) was founded by two Scotsmen in 1883 and sold soft drinks and cordials

1890s: Golf ball
The first golf club, the Singapore Golf Club, was formed and the game became a hit among the island's well-heeled. The club later merged with another to form the Singapore Island Country Club

1900s: Piece of railway track
The first stretch of the Singapore-Kranji railway line opened in 1903 and when an extension to Woodlands was ready, connected travellers to Malaya with a ferry service across the Johor Strait



1910s: Singapore Sling
The gin-based cocktail was developed by a bartender at the Raffles Hotel and has become the drink associated with this island

Singapore bicentennial: An island's journey



A year of activities will mark the 200th anniversary of the British arrival in Singapore this year. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in announcing the plans, said 1819 marked a turning point: "Because of Raffles, Singapore became a British colony, a free port and a modern city." But he also called on Singaporeans to "understand truly how far back our history reaches, and how complex it is". ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Unearthing pieces of Singapore history

FROM B5

broke the silence in 1819.

Fresh historical research of Asian texts and European archives, as well as archaeological digs since 1984, show that Singapore was in fact long acknowledged as a strategic location by mariners and others.

The finds debunk agenda-driven myths and allow Singaporeans to travel beyond the British colonial narrative and the 1965 nation-building account.

For instance, a 15th century Ming Dynasty text described Singapore as a great international centre where passengers from Indonesia could transfer to a ship going east or west.

Other sources corroborate that the island was recognised as an important point of transition between two maritime zones. Historian Dr Borschberg has seen about 1,000 mostly maritime references to it, written in languages like Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch.

The writings of Flemish gem trader Jacques de Coutre, who passed by Singapore on several occasions around 1600, reveal a detailed plan to build fortresses on and around Singapore. This took place two centuries before Raffles' arrival, and "calls into question the long-held view that he was a specially gifted person with a unique vision for Singapore Island", argues Dr Borschberg.

As well, ancient Singapore may have had an established government with a head ruler or chieftain in the late 14th century who had ties with overseas heads. In 2015, archaeologists working on a dig at Empress Place pulled from its soil imperial-grade jade ceramics produced between 1368 and 1398. Such ceramics were bestowed only on overseas leaders by China's Ming Dynasty Emperor Hongwu.

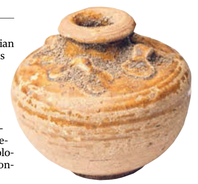
There are many more such finds.

Archaeologist Dr Miksic unearthed pristine white sand 90cm underneath the grassy expanse of the Padang – part of what was once the old city's shoreline. His find is further proof that the Malay Annals' account of how Sang Nila Utama first landed on the island in 1299 because he was attracted by white sand, is more than mere legend.

More pieces of the puzzle are falling into place.



Archaeologist Lim Chen Sian (standing) led the 2015 Empress Place dig, which unearthed 14th-century imperial-grade jade ceramics. ST FILE PHOTO





Artefacts found in the Empress Place dig include a glazed 14th-century stoneware jarlet (top) and an imperial-grade ceramic vessel. PHOTOS: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD



Human teeth found by Mr Lim and his team on the grounds of Victoria Concert Hall in 2011. The teeth were from early inhabitants of Singapore. PHOTO: LIM CHEN SIAN

In 2011, archaeologist Lim Chen Sian and his team found the teeth of inhabitants from the 1300s to 1600s on the grounds of Victoria Concert Hall. It is the first time human remains from early Singapore have been found. The team was abuzz with questions – did pirates or bandits attack the people there? Had there been a battle, catastrophe or calamity?

Human civilisation can even be traced back to thousands of years ago, following the discovery of neolithic stone tools on Pulau Ubin and in Tuas.

Since the 1980s, experts have been publishing papers and books on these finds to redress the imbalanced public perception of Singapore's history. And in the lead-up to the bicentennial, they have fronted public seminars and discussions on the island's 700-year-old past.

The Singapore Bicentennial Office's opening act this year also rather creatively impressed upon the public that Raffles had not discovered Singapore on his own. The office erased his statue by the Singapore River in an optical illusion and reinstated him only after installing four more historically important characters alongside him.

Across Singapore, people across sectors are relooking, documenting and presenting their stories and lesser-known histories this year as part of a packed bicentennial calendar. Collectively, these efforts will add much needed threads of historic detail, perspectives and missing links to Singapore's longer past.

This nationwide effort could very possibly establish a longsighted and broader view of the country's history among a much wider network of Singaporeans, and spark a new way of imagining and dreaming about the place Singaporeans call home, says historian Chua Ai Lin.

WHAT TO EXPECT OUT OF 2019?

Apart from intangible continuities, such as the importance of open-mindedness towards multiculturalism and the sheer importance of sovereignty, experts are expecting some tangible changes to accompany the year-long history and heritage exercise.

They believe that policy adjustments are in order to circumvent the blind destruction of key markers of pre- and post-independent Singapore's history.

Singapore has sometimes neglected and erased its past in the frenzied quest to redevelop the country. As a consequence, the country has regularly lost, with little to no documentation, beloved building icons, popular street food stretches in areas such as Chinatown, its only free hawking zone – the 1930s Sungei Road flea market – as well as islander and kampung ways of life.

This short-sightedness also applies to archaeology.

Historians note that in the 1970s, the National Museum "was not equipped to appreciate the importance" of Chinese porcelain shards discovered when the Kallang estuary was dredged, therefore missing the opportunity to recover a larger body of archaeological evidence.

Although the authorities are more cautious today, the approach is still very much inconsistent, say those in the heritage community.

For instance, the 2015 Empress Place archaeological dig which unearthed 14th century imperial-grade jade ceramics was actually a rushed rescue mission. The team had to share the site with the developer, which was turning the place into an integrated arts, culture and lifestyle precinct for SG50. To some observers, it did not make sense that the team was placed under such a tight deadline to salvage important centuries-old artefacts, for the cosmetic improvements of a 200-year-old district to celebrate 50 years of independence.

And this had taken place some 40 years after the Kallang estuary misjudgment.

As a start and to lead the way for the private sector, the heritage community believes mandatory heritage impact assessments should be conducted for government-initiated redevelopment works. The assessments should cover both above-ground and underground heritage, says architectural conservator Yeo Kang Shua.

This pre-emptive step will give Singapore a decent shot at unearthing more information about its longer history. Archaeologists have identified areas such as the Raffles' landing site, Kampong Glam, Pulau Ubin, Pulau Tekong, Sembawang, Bedok and East Coast as significant.

Public engagement will also give post-1965 structures a chance to live on, if assessed to be important.

The archaeological fraternity has also been in need of funds and manpower for the analysis of box upon box of artefacts. This is a sitting treasure trove of new insights into the past which has, for decades, been lacking financial and human resources for in-depth study.

For example, analysis of the teeth found on the grounds of the Victoria Concert Hall could reveal what the early inhabitants of the island used to eat.

The heritage community has eagerly pinned its hopes on history and heritage moving up the ranks of the nation's priorities as a direct outcome of the bicentennial year. It hopes for a nationwide recognition of history's role in shaping a country's identity and values which can help see the nation through its first century as a maturing Republic.

Indeed, the bicentennial will be worth its salt only if its impact extends well beyond 2019.

melodyz@sph.com.sg

HOPES FOR THE YEAR



DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES NEEDED

The Indian diaspora in Singapore is lingually and religiously diverse. I hope more will be written so that their stories, with all their diverse perspectives, are documented and made digitally accessible. Such an effort should be ongoing.

FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE AND INDEPENDENT CURATOR AND MUSEUM CONSULTANT, GAURI KRISHNAN



BEYONDTHE MAIN COMMUNITIES

It is a chance to acknowledge our history and celebrate the contributions of our forefathers. More can certainly be done to show that Singapore was, and is, not only about the main communities, but also about the many others – some of whom have much longer links to the region than those who came in the last 200 years.

HERITAGE BLOGGER JEROME LIM



NOT A ONE-OFF NATIONAL EFFORT

That Singapore has a history that stretches beyond 200 years; that the events will get us to reflect on the larger forces that have shaped our history and, in many ways, our identity as a people; that the bicentennial can serve as a catalyst for further ruminations about Singapore's history, and not be a one-off national effort.

HISTORIAN TAN TAI YONG

10 BOOKS ON S'PORE

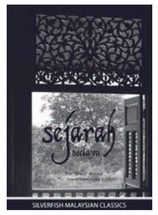
The Sunday Times picks works on the Republic's history that you can read to impress party guests



Ong Sor Fern
Senior Culture Correspondent

1. The Malay Annals: Sejarah Melayu translated by John Leyden, with an introduction by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles

- Silverfish Books/207 pages/National Library call number English 959.51 SEJ

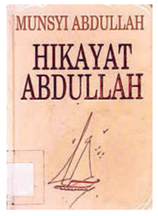


That story about Sang Nila Utama and the lion sighting that inspired the name Singapura? This is the source. While there has been some debate about historical accuracy, this is one of the most important texts about the origins of the Malacca Sultanate. The pages describing royal marriages are intended to establish the divine rights of rulers, but what makes it an engaging read are the fables. Some stories are familiar to Singaporeans, such as the tale of the swordfish attack. But it is the lesser known myths that will engage contemporary readers.

Bluffer's byte: How can you not be gripped by a book with a story of Champion Badang, who gained his superhuman strength by eating the vomit of a hantu (spectre)?

2. Hikayat Abdullah by Munsyi Abdullah

- Malaysian Branch of the Asiatic Society/353 pages/National Library call number English 959.5 ABD



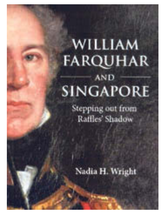
Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, better known as Munsyi Abdullah, was a Malacca-born Arab-Indian Muslim who became Thomas Stamford Raffles' copyist in 1810, and was later his secretary and translator in Singapore. His memoir, Hikayat Abdullah, published in 1849, is a must-read as it offers a first-hand eyewitness account of historic events and people. He offers fascinating vignettes of Raffles and William Farquhar. He paints a detailed image of Raffles: "He had light brown hair, indicative of bravery; large ears, the mark of a ready listener."

And he says of Farquhar: "(H)e treats both rich and poor alike, never looking on one person as more important than another."

Bluffer's byte: From rat and centipede infestations to a murder attempt on Colonel Farquhar, this is the go-to book for a local point of view.

3. William Farquhar And Singapore: Stepping Out From Raffles' Shadow by Nadia H. Wright

- Entrepot Publishing/$28 with GST/National Library call number: English 959.5703 WRI



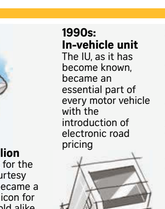
If you want to know how Colonel William Farquhar and Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles went from BFFs (that's "best friends forever" in contemporary-speak) to hostile frenemies, then New Zealand-born author Nadia H. Wright's book is for you.

Raffles was so chummy with Farquhar that he stayed with the latter twice when he was in Malacca on sick leave. But by the time Farquhar left Singapore in 1824, relations between the two men were so acrimonious that Farquhar made a formal complaint to the East India Company against Raffles.

Bluffer's byte: Great retelling of the biggest catfight in Singapore's history, and how Farquhar might have lost the battle then, but could win the war now as the one really responsible for Singapore's survival.

4. The Golden Chersonese: Singapore, Malacca, Singei, Ujong, Selengor, Penang and Perak by Isabella L. Bird

- Monsoon Books/352 pages/National Library call number 915.951 BIR



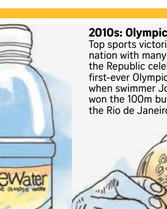
The intrepid Isabella Bird was an inveterate explorer who wrote about her travels through China, Japan and South-east Asia. The Golden Chersonese includes passages about her detours to Singapore while exploring the Malay peninsula. While Singapore did not seem to engage her as much as Japan, she does offer vivid descriptions of the bustle of Singapore city life and the vivacity of colonial society here.

Bluffer's byte: Her conversational tone – the book is based on letters to her sister Henrietta – means that the narrative reads like a chatty gossip session.

If this book grabs you, read the much prettier and less wordy manga, Isabella Bird In Wonderland, by Sassa Taiga (Kadokawa, 239 pages, $22.70 with GST from Kinokuniya), which turns her into a sparkly, wide-eyed heroine travelling through Japan.

5. Studying Singapore Before 1800, edited by Kwa Chong Guan and Peter Borschberg

- NUS Press/600 pages/$48 without GST/National Library call number 959.57 STU



This collection of 19 essays by historians and academics is for the hardcore history nut. They range from a deep dive into the intricacies of mapping ancient Chinese and Indian place names for Singapore, to an essay on the succession battle for the Malacca Sultanate that paved the way for Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles' political machinations to found a port here, to accounts of naval battles off our shores as the Acehnese fought the Portuguese in 1577 and the latter faced off with the Dutch in 1603. Useful if you want to learn more about the sources and research that unearthed Singapore's ancient history.

Bluffer's byte: Get ready for big words such as "hermeneutic", "Neolithic celt" and "nomenclature". And brace yourself for footnotes that can take up more space on the page than the part of the essay being footnoted.

6. A History Of Modern Singapore: 1819 - 2005 by Constance Mary Turnbull

- NUS Press/488 pages/$50 without GST/National Library call number 959.57 TUR



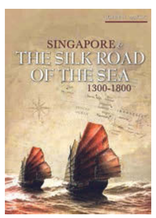
Think of this as Singapore History 101. The author takes 1819 as the starting point, but gives a brief nod to events before Raffles.

There are vivid sketches of Singapore society post-Raffles' landing – from the easy mix of Europeans and Asians in early colonial society to the multiple spats between the East India Company and local merchants. The throwaway tidbits of trivia will make you sit up, such as one line that casually mentions how, in the 1880s, the colonial administration was reluctant to ban female prostitutes because that would have encouraged homosexual prostitution, "fostered for many years by the importation of Hainanese boys".

Bluffer's byte: Turnbull does such a good job of capturing Singapore's roaring frontier spirit – replete with pirates, drugs and prostitutes, along with corruption and political intrigue – that you would be convinced this is a Netflix series waiting to happen.

7. Singapore And The Silk Road Of The Sea: 1300 - 1800 by John N. Miksic

- NUS Press/520 pages/$58 without GST/National Library call number 959.57 MIK

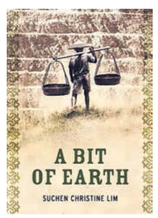


Forget sleepy fishing village. In the 14th century, Singapore was a bustling port of call on a sea route that linked China's merchants with Arab traders. There was manufacturing here and a healthy trade, with merchants exchanging goods and currencies, as well as a fortified city whose residents included Chinese and Arabs, as well as indigenous peoples from around the South-east Asian region. Professor John N. Miksic's book draws on 25 years of archaeological research in Singapore and meticulously documents findings from digs that have uncovered everything from earthenware pottery and small copper objects to Chinese coins and beads.

Bluffer's byte: A tad academic – one does not need to know the location of every single coin and bead unearthed during the digs – but a must-read for anyone interested in Singapore's deep history.

8. A Bit Of Earth by Suchen Christine Lim

- Marshall Cavendish/424 pages/$21.40 with GST/available at National Library



For history refracted through the lens of fiction, go for Singapore Literature Prize winner Suchen Christine Lim. A Bit Of Earth is an epic narrative that captures the voices of the common folk, the humble immigrants who came from China to make a home for themselves in the promising frontier lands of Indonesia, Malaya and Singapore. The main protagonist is Wong Tuck Heng, who comes to Bandong in Malaya in 1874 and rises from coolie boy to towkay. Lim captures the vibrant sprawl of political changes, as power shifts from Malay royalty to British colonialists, as well as the quotidian struggles of people who are just trying to eke out a living.

Bluffer's byte: This story about the hopes and fears of 19th-century Chinese immigrants still resonates in today's world where migrants are facing rejection and persecution in many societies.

9. 1819 by Isa Kamari

- Silverfish Books/243 pages/National Library call number: English 899.283 ISA

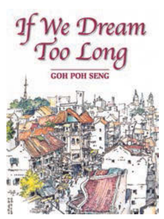


This ambitious novel by Cultural Medallion award recipient Isa Kamari narrates the story of Singapore's colonisation by the British. He does not shy away from savage depictions of Sultan Hussein Muhammad Shah, who signed Singapore over to the British in return for an allowance. And his novel is packed with lively characters inspired by real-life historical figures, including a weary Stamford Raffles, an affable William Farquhar and a scheming John Crawfurd. More engaging, however, are his takes on local historical characters, including the mystical Habib Nuh Habib Muhammad, a beloved Islamic preacher; a scholarly and conflicted Munsyi Abdullah Abdul Kadir, Raffles' writer; as well as Wak Cantuk, a healer, silat master and budding revolutionary.

Bluffer's byte: The fun way to learn about Singapore's colonisation, with a good dash of local input to balance the historical British propaganda.

10. If We Dream Too Long by Goh Poh Seng

- NUS Press/178 pages/$22 without GST/available at National Library



First published in 1972, Goh Poh Seng's If We Dream Too Long captures the maturation of a young man, Kwang Meng, as he finishes school and enters the workforce in 1960s Singapore.

The hustle of Singapore society as the pursuit of economic growth drives all and a materialistic mindset takes root is contrasted with the dreamy aimlessness of Kwang Meng as he struggles to find meaning in his clerical job.

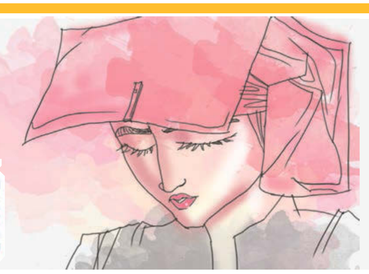
Fluidly written, and full of vivid evocations of daily life as Singapore transitions from rural to aspiring middle class, If We Dream Too Long is both time capsule and philosophical text.

Bluffer's byte: Kwang Meng is totally an "emo" millennial trapped in 1960s Singapore.

200 years in 20 objects

1920s: Axe Brand Universal Oil
One of Singapore's smallest but more well-known products globally, Axe Oil began to be produced. It is named after the axe as the item used to be an essential item, to cut wood for fire





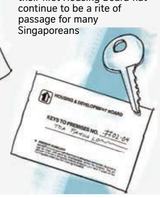
1930s: Samsui woman's hat
The trademark cloth headgear distinguished Samsui women, many of whom arrived from China to toil under the blazing sun to build a rapidly urbanising nation's infrastructure



1940s: Banana notes
The Japanese occupied Singapore during World War II and the currency they issued was nicknamed "banana money" after the fruit trees on the $10 notes

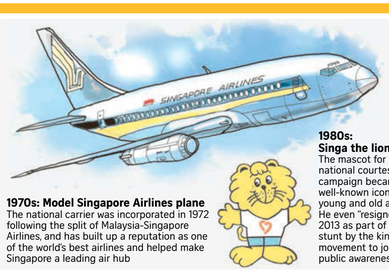


1950s: Singapore Flag
The red and white flag was designed after Singapore gained self-government within the British Empire in 1959, and adopted later that year. It was retained when Singapore became a state in Malaysia, and upon independence in 1965



1960s: HDB key envelope
Public housing was built at breakneck speed to house a young nation, and the keys to their first Housing Board flat continue to be a rite of passage for many Singaporeans

1970s: Model Singapore Airlines plane
The national carrier was incorporated in 1972 following the split of Malaysia-Singapore Airlines, and has built up a reputation as one of the world's best airlines and helped make Singapore a leading air hub



1980s: Singa the lion
The mascot for the national courtesy campaign became a well-known icon for young and old alike. He even "resigned" in 2013 as part of a stunt by the kindness movement to jolt public awareness

1990s: In-vehicle unit
The IU, as it has become known, became an essential part of every motor vehicle with the introduction of electronic road pricing



2000s: NEWater bottle
Technology to recycle or reclaim water achieved a milestone in 2003 when this made-in-Singapore essential was rolled out. NEWater now meets a sizeable proportion of the island's water needs



2010s: Olympic gold medal
Top sports victories are rare for a nation with many other firsts, till the Republic celebrated its first-ever Olympic gold in 2016 when swimmer Joseph Schooling won the 100m butterfly race at the Rio de Janeiro Games

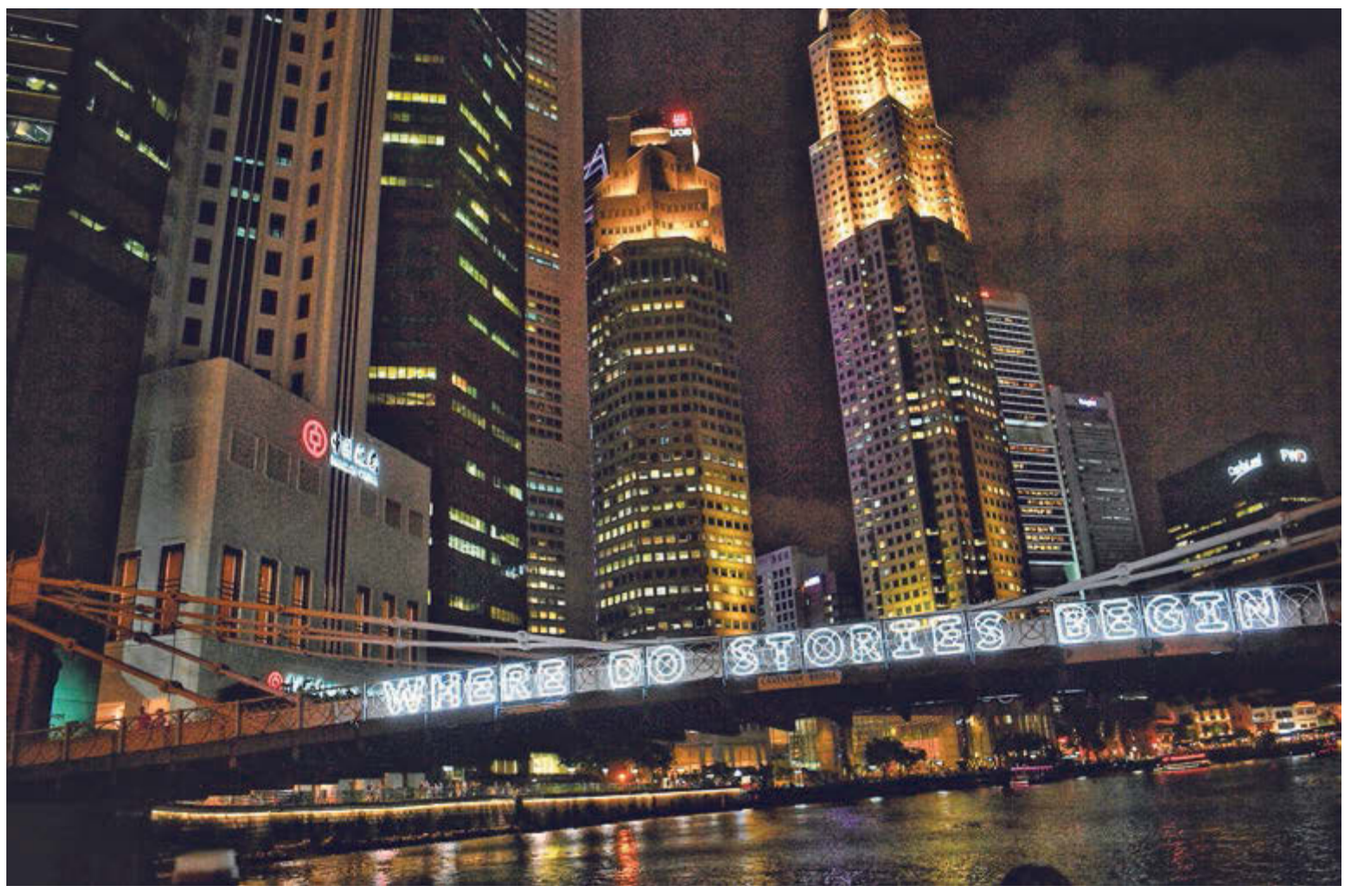
SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS | ST ILLUSTRATIONS: CEL GULAPA

Singapore bicentennial: An island's journey

Arts and culture highlights

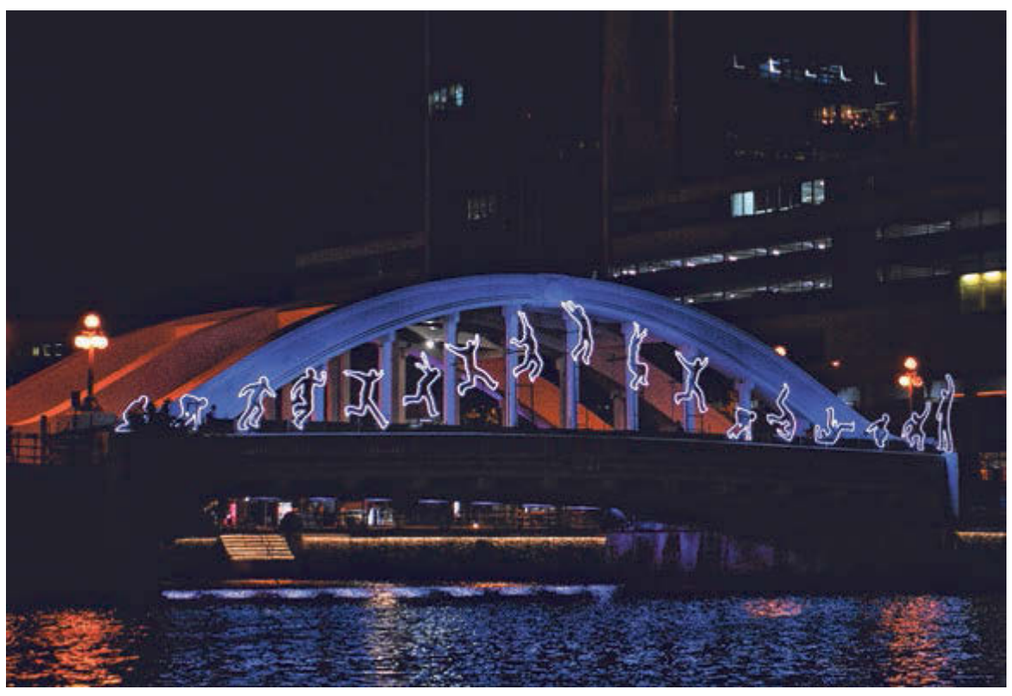
Many of the bicentennial events are extensions of already existing calendar attractions, or spins on planned events. With plenty of exhibitions and shows, the year will be jam-packed with offerings. Senior culture correspondent Ong Sor Fern picks some of the highlights.

JANUARY



Starting the year on a bright note is the i Light Singapore festival, which will officially kick off the commemoration on Jan 28. This year's event, on till Feb 24, is a bicentennial edition offering additional light installations beyond its traditional Marina Bay area venue. The festival's 33 artworks all follow the bicentennial theme of Bridges Of Time, quite literally too in the case of six works which will be installed at the bridges spanning the Singapore River.

Singapore art duo Perception3 and artist Michael Lee collaborated on a piece for Cavenagh Bridge which features two lines of text made with LED neon rope. One side of the bridge will feature the phrase "Where do stories begin" and the other side, "Where do stories end". Perception3's Regina de Rozario says the lines, seen against the backdrop of the city, are "prompts for questioning and reflection – a sort of 'reframing' of how we might usually see and appreciate our skyline, and all the narratives of how we got to this point".



FEBRUARY

The Asian Civilisations Museum is dedicating an exhibition to the reason for the bicentennial commemoration: Sir Stamford Raffles, who landed in Singapore on Jan 28, 1819. The show, titled Raffles In Southeast Asia: Revisiting The Scholar And The Statesman, showcases items he personally collected in South-east Asia as well as indigenous artefacts which put his collection in context. Beyond his job as a representative of the British East India Company, Raffles was also the author of The History Of Java. The exhibition questions his status as an "authority".

The exhibition will run from Feb 1 to April 28.

Open: 10am to 7pm daily, 10am to 9pm on Fridays

Admission: Free



MARCH/APRIL

Imagine a Harry Potter-style Marauder's Map that allows you entry into multiple stories about Singapore's historic nooks and crannies, and you get the Find Your Place In History Trails – City Centre Edition, a website that will map out a series of installations tucked away at various spots around the city. The City Centre Edition will feature stories projected onto the walls of places such as the Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre and the Thian Hock Keng temple in Telok Ayer Street.

These tales will be told over four weekends from March 15 in conjunction with the Singapore Heritage Festival. There will be a Heartland Edition of these trails, with five community roadshows kicking off the trails in five regions of the island. These will be launched progressively from April to August.



MAY



For an off-centre take on the bicentennial, mark your calendar for The Necessary Stage's Civilised. Playwright Haresh Sharma (far left) is taking on colonisation, not just in Singapore, but also its manifestations in the past, present and future. The play will be directed by the company's artistic director Alvin Tan (left) and star Edith Podesta, Ghafir Akbar, Koh Wan Ching and Siti Khalijah Zainal. The play will be on at The Necessary Stage's Black Box from May 15 to 26. Ticket sales begin in February.

JUNE/JULY

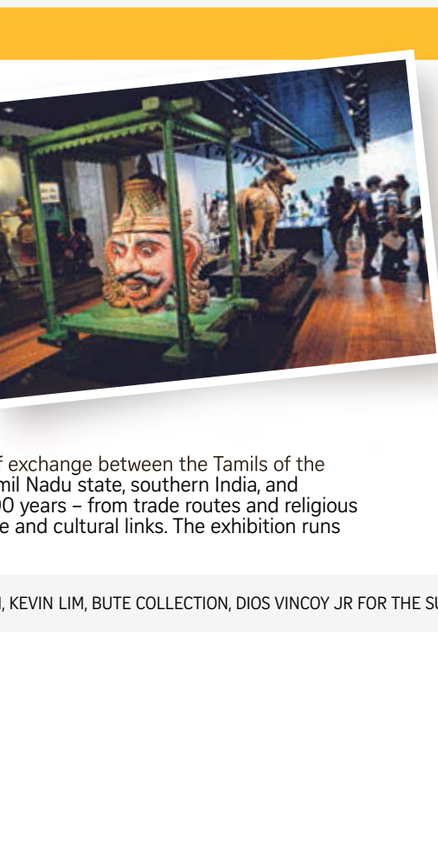
The tent-pole event for the bicentennial happens from June 1 to September. From Singapore To Singaporeans: The Bicentennial Experience @ Fort Canning will tell the story of 700 years of Singapore history through moving sets, live performances and multimedia. There will be a timed experience in five acts at the Fort Canning Centre as well as a free and easy experience at the Fort Gate. The show is orchestrated by theatre director Beatrice Chia-Richmond (far left) and media consultant and playwright Michael Chiang (left). Watch out for a depiction of the fierce naval battles between the Portuguese and Dutch which happened off the coast of Changi in 1603 as they fought for control of Asia's trade routes.



AUGUST

This month offers the chance to look at one of the earliest known depictions of South-east Asia and Singapore – the Selden Map of China. This map, painted with watercolours and ink on Chinese paper, is believed to have been produced in the early 17th century and features shipping routes from China's Quanzhou port in Fujian province to South-east Asian destinations.

The National Library Board borrowed the map from the Oxford University's famed Bodleian Library for the Early Singapore exhibition. The show will feature other rare maps, including the Bute map (right), the earliest known landward map of Singapore which records an early view of the settlement circa 1820.



SEPTEMBER

The British were not the only colonial power with an active interest in Singapore and South-east Asia. They had to battle the Dutch for supremacy in this region in the 17th century. The National Museum of Singapore's show, An Old New World: From The East Indies To The Founding Of Singapore, 1600 - 1819, looks at the formation of the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company, and how their pursuit of spices brought them to this part of the world.

The exhibition will feature more than 200 objects from the National Collection as well as items borrowed from international museums.



OCTOBER

The Malay Heritage Centre's overarching annual theme this year is bangsa, which means nation or people. As part of its Malay CultureFest , it is organising an exhibition that will look at non-European perspectives of Singapore's significance before the British arrived. Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera, dan Sebingkai Cermin (A Lion, A Prince And A Framed Mirror): Reflecting And Refracting Singapura will draw from Malay, Javanese, Siamese, Arab and Chinese sources, promising a thoughtful counterpoint to the colonial narrative. This exhibition will run till June 2020.



NOVEMBER

After learning about early Malay history, you can turn your attention to another community with a long history in South-east Asia. The Indian Heritage Centre will be presenting From The Coromandel Coast To The Straits – Revisiting Our Tamil Heritage. The exhibition will look at the lengthy history of exchange between the Tamils of the Coromandel coast in Tamil Nadu state, southern India, and South-east Asia over 200 years – from trade routes and religious ties to political exchange and cultural links. The exhibition runs till June next year.

DECEMBER

End the year on a pop culture note. The Gardens by the Bay will be hosting a special customised work by an art collective. The work will reflect the hopes and wishes of Singaporeans collected at various events through the bicentennial year. Expect an Instagram-friendly, tech-savvy installation with multimedia elements.

PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAMAR, THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, JUNID JUANI, SEAH KWANG PENG, FELINE LIM, KEVIN LIM, BUTE COLLECTION, DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES, LIANHE ZAOBAO, MARK CHEONG, GARDENS BY THE BAY SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

What's Trending

Put pen to paper and journal your way through the year

Video creators inspire netizens to share their habits, write to-do lists – anything at all – on social media



Nilanjana Sengupta



YouTuber Jenny Journals decorating her 2019 Bullet Journal. Elaborately illustrated journals have prompted the system's creator to assure users that what matters most is the content, not the presentation. PHOTO: SCREENGRAB/YOUTUBE

They open pretty planners and journals, draw and doodle in them, colour the margins, stick happy stickers, jot goals down and are altogether a rage. They are Plan With Me video creators on YouTube and Instagram.

The beginning of a year – when the months ahead look open and inviting, and all of us are looking for ways to reorganise and make a fresh start – is usually the time these videos on planning tips and tools are particularly trending.

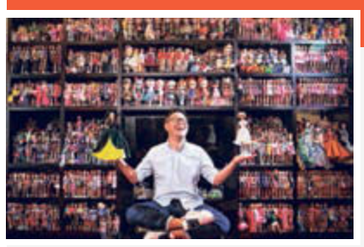
Whether it is penning your daily to-do lists neatly or setting up a habit tracker that helps you keep tabs on your core habits (did you wash your face before bedtime or get your eight-hour beauty sleep, for instance), or just finding a space to pen down your dreams and actions, there is something for everyone.

Bullet Journal, or BuJo, an analogue system created by New York-based digital product designer and author Ryder Carroll, seems to be one of the most popular tools used by these creators.

Diagnosed with learning disabilities early in life, he was forced to figure out alternative ways to be focused and productive, a note on his www.bulletjournal.com website says. After years of trial and error, he created the methodology that went far beyond simple organisation, the note adds.

Bullet journalling involves using a notebook to create calendars, use as a diary, make plans, brainstorm and so on. But there is a method to it – such as logging your tasks, indexing the pages, creating collections of ideas – that takes it beyond the usual scribble on a sticky note.

ONLY ONLINE
The week's top 3 picks at straitstimes.com



VIDEO: Barmy over Barbie
Singaporean Jian Yang's collection of some 10,000 Barbie dolls is among the largest in the world. str.sg/luvbarbie

VIDEO: World's 'rubbish bin'
With its huge imports of plastic waste, Malaysia is becoming the world's "rubbish bin", says Greenpeace. str.sg/trashcan

VIDEO: Hangout with ST
Multimedia journalists Alyssa Woo and Hairianto Diman remember the late actor Aloysius Pang. str.sg/hangout48

NOTABLE TRENDS

JULEN: Two-year-old Julen Rosello fell into a deep well nearly two weeks ago in southern Spain. His body was recovered yesterday morning.

CROSS ISLAND LINE: The first phase of Singapore's longest fully underground MRT line will be completed by 2029, it was announced last week.

DAVOS: World leaders and CEOs met at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last week to discuss how to steer policy amid slowing growth, damaging trade wars and Brexit.

Some popular practitioners on YouTube are Amanda Rach Lee (whose 2019 bullet journal set-up video has had close to two million views already), Christine My Linh (whose video on setting up a minimal and simple journal for the year has 94,000 views) and Jenny Journals, who has more than half a million views for her January 2019 set-up video.

"Similar to Study With Me and Clean With Me videos, Plan With Me videos are designed to inspire and encourage viewers to take action by following a creator's example," said YouTube in its January newsletter.

But if you are just starting out, some of these videos can be a bit intimidating, given the fact that almost all these YouTubers are also artists and their journals are very detailed with beautiful art, sketches and paintings.

There is a lot of play on special paints, embossing powder, inks, colourful scotch tape and decorating that could leave a first timer wondering about the journalling part of this methodology.

The apparent emphasis in these videos on spending time dressing up your journal before you write in it could explain why some viewers are still going back to the brief but simple introductory video by Mr Carroll uploaded in 2015, which has more than nine million views so far.

YouTube user powerpuff4ever wrote: "I always come back to the original how-to. I love watching flip-throughs and plan-with-me videos but some people's bullet journals are so complicated and I get discouraged so quickly because I want to incorporate all these intricate spreads and I forget how simple the journal can be."

Indeed in an article last month, Mr Carroll addressed the elaborately illustrated journals in some of the BuJo videos online.

They're gorgeous and motivating to some, but intimidating to many others, he said.

"People assume they can't Bullet Journal because they're not artists or because their handwriting is too sloppy. Allow me to lay those concerns to rest. The only thing that matters in BuJo is the content, not the presentation. If you can elevate both, then my hat's off to you. But the only artistic skill required is the ability to draw straightish lines. If you can manage that, then you'll be fine," he wrote.

If you have been a notebook or journal enthusiast but still struggle with taking your to-do lists or penned ideas to the next level, BuJo may be the way to go. That it would also help you keep the art of handwriting alive is a bonus.

HOW DO YOU WRITE 'X'?

It's the Yanny-Laurel debate of 2019.

Remember the four-second audio clip that set Twitter alight last year? Listeners couldn't decide whether they could hear the sound "yanny" or "laurel" when the clip was played. One expert tried to solve the mystery by explaining that the clip was apparently a result of the McGurk effect, an illusion in which people hear something different from the actual sound due to a visual stimulus. It occurs more often when the audio is of poor quality.

"So... it's actually a very poor quality recording and the brain gets influenced by what you read first, before you actually hear it. What gets people confused is that it's not Yanny or Laurel, it's more of a Yarel thing," Mr Raul Veiga, chief executive of production company Radial Producoes, told Buzzfeed News then.

Now, a debate on how to write the letter "x" has divided the Internet. It was triggered by a tweet from Philadelphia-based Kasey Ehrgott (@Smasey), which asked the question: "Which way would you draw an X?"

The accompanying image showed eight possible options in which diagonal lines can be drawn to make the letter X.

The tweet has had more than 70,000 likes and the responses range from surprise to amusement.

User Kelsey Campbell wrote: "Saw this. Immediately forgot how I have been drawing x's my entire life. Had to write each one down. None felt right. Taking all words with x's out of my vocabulary until further notice."

User Hannah Wilks replied, "5! There are other ways?"

Several tweets later, the original tweeter @Smasey noted, "General consensus is that Americans do 7 & 8 while UK does 5 & 6. Probably how we were taught. Not sure about other countries."

Some countries celebrate Jan 23 as handwriting day, and this debate coming in that very week seems like a fitting Internet gift.

nilasen@sph.com

#OpinionOfTheDay

I choose my books over Marie Kondo



Olivia Ho

People keep telling me about Marie Kondo. Ever since the Japanese queen of decluttering got her own Netflix show, I am updated every other day with new developments in her so-called war on bibliophiles.

First, it was: "Marie Kondo wants you to throw away your books!"

Book-lovers are up in arms over a meme which shows Kondo with a speech-bubble that reads, "Ideally, keep less than 30 books." In a Guardian column, novelist Anakana Schofield criticised the "sparking joy" metric as being inapplicable to literature. In a now-deleted tweet, writer Jennifer Wright declared Kondo a "monster".

Kondo is rather maligned here, I feel. She has said that 30 books is the limit she herself prefers to maintain at home, but this is not prescriptive. I should hope not, since I discover about 30 new favourite books a year.

Watching Kondo's show did, however, make me re-examine my own book collection. There is another Japanese concept, "tsundoku", which means accumulating more books than you end up reading. It is a badge of honour for bibliophiles, but also, logistically, a problem.

At work, I maintain what I like to call the Begonia Library, really a glorified filing cabinet for review copies in one of our storerooms named after flowers (why, I do not know. There is nothing remotely floral about this arrangement).

It is a name that conveys reclining on a garden terrace, leafing through leather-bound volumes. In reality, it is trying to fit an inexorably increasing number of books into a finite cabinet. Tetris-ing the Epigram Books Fiction Prize longlist into a space that the shortlist would find challenging. Dropping 700 pages of Haruki Murakami on my toe.

At home, I have a bookshelf. The bookshelf is full. I have taken to stacking books in the space under the dresser (if you do it in a certain way, they collect less dust) but the dresser is, like all things, finite.

I think of myself as anti-Kondo. Not in that I am opposed to her methods, which are clearly immensely helpful to many people; also, the woman is a folding genius.

I am anti-Kondo in that I operate in the opposite direction. Kondo asks people to throw things out of their homes. I tend to take such things and put them in my home. Witness, for instance, the many books I have acquired from other people KonMari-ing their stashes.

The latest and most extreme example of this tendency was my attempt to rescue a beautiful blue bookshelf – a relic from a festival pop-up last year, destined otherwise for disposal – which I had hoped might be a new home for my tomes.

Unfortunately, this was foiled when I realised it was too big to go through the door. I was gutted. I hope it finds a new home somewhere else and that some other more diminutive used bookshelf wanders into my life.

Many well-meaning people have tried to advise me about the book hoarding. "Perhaps you should put them in storage," they say, missing the fundamental point of having a book collection – to wake up surrounded by their spines, to pull them out on a whim to refer to a quote or simply to savour their words. Stay me with prose, comfort me with poetry, for I am sick of looking at screens all day.

I lost my books once. This was in the second year of university, when I moved into a London apartment prone to many catastrophes – power outages, a slug invasion and even a break-in. While I was away in summer, rainwater flooded my basement room and soaked the books I kept under the window.

By the time they were discovered, most were bloated with damp. T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land had drowned, like its character Phlebas the Phoenician. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions was positively engorged, though I felt this was par for the course for Rousseau.

This would have been the point where Kondo would have told me to get rid of the books and buy new copies. Instead, I dried the survivors, peeling them apart page by page and taping dissolving spines back together. When I moved back to Singapore, I brought them home.

Does my book clutter cause me stress? Sure, among many other feelings. I witness their slow decay in the humid weather. I track the yellowing of their pages. What I feel when I pick them up is not just the spark of joy that Kondo describes, the quickening of one's cells to which she adds the winsome sound effect "Ching!" They make me sad and possessive and proud and sorry that I cannot do better by them.

This is the guilt Kondo wants you to avoid. But if you are to treat things as if they are alive, as she does, then how can one not feel guilty about abandoning them or not housing them as they deserve?

This attachment to things should not surprise me, for I am descended from hoarders. My grandmother has hoarded red packets, used and unused, for years. She estimates she has close to a thousand. I have not attempted to verify this, since counting hongbao with no money in them is not my idea of a fun afternoon.

My mother struggles to throw things away. Only last year, she admitted, did she give away the baby food processor with which she had prepared meals for my infant self.

I tell myself I am keeping the books for a higher purpose. That one day they will fill a proper library, which will be the inheritance I leave my unborn children.

After all, growing up in a house full of books gives children a head-start in life in terms of literacy and numeracy, a new study led by Dr Joanna Sikora of Australian National University has shown. I want my books to raise my children with me.

So I have not solved the happy problem of my tsundoku, but at least I have found some validation for it. Marie might not Kondone it, but we can shelve that dispute for now.

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- Follow Olivia Ho on Instagram @ohomatopoeia
- #OpinionOfTheDay is a column for younger writers in the newsroom to write about issues that matter to them and their peers.

How the US and China can avoid war

The China menace looms large in Washington. A critical review of assumptions is needed.

Kishore Mahbubhani



US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping at a business leaders event at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in a photo taken in November 2017. Just as careful diplomacy is required in military matters, it is also integral to America's economic relations with China. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Within about 15 years, China's economy will surpass America's and become the largest in the world. As this moment approaches, meanwhile, a consensus has formed in Washington that China poses a significant threat to American interests and well-being.

General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), has said that "China probably poses the greatest threat to our nation by about 2025". The summary of America's 2018 National Defence Strategy claims that China and Russia are "revisionist powers" seeking to "shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model – gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions".

Two main currents are driving these concerns. One is economic: that China has undermined the US economy by pursuing unfair trade practices, demanding technology transfers, stealing intellectual property, and imposing non-tariff barriers that impede access to Chinese markets. The other current is political: that China's successful economic development has not been accompanied by the liberal democratic reform Western governments, and particularly the United States, had expected; and that China has become too aggressive in its dealing with other nations.

Reading about the imminent threat American officials believe China poses, it is not hard to see why Graham Allison, in his book Destined For War, reaches the depressing conclusion that armed conflict between the two countries is more likely than not.

Yet since China is not mounting a military force to threaten or invade the US, not trying to intervene in America's domestic politics, and not engaged in a deliberate campaign to destroy the American economy, we must consider that, in spite of the increasing clamour about the threat China poses to the US, it is still possible for America to find a way to deal peaceably with a China that will become the No. 1 economic, and possibly geopolitical, power within a decade — and to do so in a way that advances its own interests, even as it constrains China's.

REVIEW ASSUMPTIONS

America must first reconsider a long-held belief about China's political system. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, American policymakers have been convinced that it would only be a matter of time before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) followed the Soviet Communist Party into the political grave.

Politicians and policymakers on both ends of the political spectrum accepted, implicitly or explicitly, the famous thesis of Francis Fukuyama that there was only one historical road to follow. What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

When former US president Bill Clinton explained in March 2000 why he supported China's admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), he stressed that political liberation would inevitably flow from economic liberalisation, concluding that "if you believe in a future of greater openness and freedom for the people of China, you ought to be for this agreement".

It is worth considering the conviction of American policymakers that they could so confidently dispense political prescriptions to China. No other empire, of course, has accumulated as much economic, political, and military power as the US has. Yet, it has still been less than 250 years since the Declaration of Independence was signed, in 1776. China, by contrast, is considerably older, and the Chinese people have learnt from several thousand years of history that they suffer most when the central government is weak and divided.

In American eyes, the contest between America's and China's political systems is one between a democracy, where the people freely choose their government and enjoy freedom of speech and of religion, and an autocracy, where the people have no such freedoms.

To neutral observers, however, it could just as easily be seen as a choice between a plutocracy in the US, where major public policy decisions end up favouring the rich over the masses, and a meritocracy in China, where major public policy decisions made by officials chosen by party elites on the basis of ability and performance have resulted in a striking alleviation of poverty.

REFORMS AND THE NEW TIANXIA

This doesn't mean that the Chinese political system should remain in its current form forever. Human rights violations — such as the detention of hundreds of thousands of Uighurs — remain a major concern.

Within China today, there are many voices calling for reforms. Among them is the prominent liberal scholar Xu Jilin. He lodges his sharpest criticisms against his fellow Chinese scholars, and especially against what he sees as their excessive focus on the nation-state and insistence on China's essential cultural and historical difference from Western political models. He argues that this overemphasis on particularism in fact marks a departure from traditional Chinese culture, which, as exemplified by its historical *tianxia* model of foreign relations, was a universal and open system.

Criticising the blanket rejection by "extreme nationalists" among his Chinese academic peers of "anything created by Westerners", Xu argues instead that China has historically succeeded because it was open.

However, not even a liberal like Xu would call for China to replicate the American political system. China's political system will have to evolve with its social and economic conditions. And, in many respects, it has evolved significantly, becoming much more open than it once was.

When I first went to China in 1980, for instance, no Chinese were allowed to travel overseas as private tourists. Last year, roughly 134 million travelled overseas. And roughly 134 million Chinese returned home freely.

Similarly, millions of the best young Chinese minds have experienced the academic freedom of American universities. Yet, in 2017, eight in 10 Chinese students chose to return home.

Though the question remains: If things have been going well, why is President Xi Jinping imposing tighter political discipline on Communist Party members and removing term limits?

His predecessor Hu Jintao delivered spectacular economic growth. But this period was also marked by a spike in corruption and party factionalism led by Bo Xilai, the Chongqing party secretary who tried to challenge Mr Xi's rise to power, and Zhou Yongkang, the powerful domestic security chief under Mr Xi's predecessor.

Mr Xi believed these trends would delegitimise the CCP and end China's successful rejuvenation. Against these dire challenges, he saw no realistic alternative to reimposing strong central leadership. Despite doing this (or, because he did this), Mr Xi remains hugely popular.

Many in the West have been alarmed by the enormous power Mr Xi has accumulated, taking it as a harbinger of armed conflict.

Mr Xi's accumulation of power, however, has not fundamentally changed China's long-term geopolitical strategy. The Chinese have, for instance, avoided unnecessary wars. Unlike the US, which is blessed with two non-threatening neighbours in Canada and Mexico, China has difficult relations with a number of strong, nationalistic neighbours, including India, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

Quite remarkably, of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom), China is the only one among them that has not fired a single military shot across its border in 30 years, since a brief naval battle between China and Vietnam in 1988.

By contrast, even during the relatively peaceful Obama administration, the American military dropped 26,000 bombs on seven countries in a single year. Evidently, the Chinese understand well the art of strategic restraint.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Much has been made of the possibility of conflict in the South China Sea, where the Chinese have converted isolated reefs and shoals into military installations as part of larger, contested claims to sovereignty over portions of the waters.

But contrary to Western analyses, China, while undeniably more politically assertive in the region, has not become more aggressive militarily. The smaller, rival claimants to sovereignty in the South China Sea, including Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam, control a number of islands in the waters. China could easily dislodge them. It has not done so.

When considering the familiar narrative of Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, it must be remembered that the US itself has missed opportunities to defuse tensions there. A former US ambassador to China, Mr J. Stapleton Roy, told me that in a joint press conference with President Barack Obama on Sept 25, 2015, Mr Xi not only proposed an approach to the South China Sea that included the endorsement of declarations supported by all 10 members of Asean, but also, more significantly, added that China had no intention of militarising the Spratly Islands, where it had engaged in massive reclamation work on the reefs and shoals it occupied.

Yet the Obama administration made no effort to pursue China's reasonable proposal. Instead, the US Navy stepped up its patrols. In response, China increased the pace of its construction of defensive installations on the islands.

Perhaps this may be the best route to find out if China will emerge as a threat to the US and the world. If it agrees to be constrained by multiple global rules and partnerships, China could very well remain a different polity – that is, not a liberal democracy – and still not be a threatening one.

TRUMP'S TRADE WAR

Just as careful diplomacy is required in military matters, it is also integral to America's economic relations with China. Virtually no well-known mainstream economist agrees with US President Donald Trump, or his top trade adviser Peter Navarro and trade representative Robert Lighthizer, that America's trade deficits are the result of unfair practices by other countries. Professor Martin Feldstein, the former chairman of Mr Ronald Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers, has pointed out that America's global trade deficit is due to the fact that its consumption outweighs its domestic production.

Imposing tariffs on low-cost Chinese goods will not rectify this structural feature, but will serve only to make many essential goods less affordable to ordinary Americans.

Mr Trump's trade war against China has nevertheless won him broad mainstream support. This is a result of a major mistake that China has made. It has ignored growing perceptions and complaints, including by leading American figures, that China has been fundamentally unfair in many of its economic policies.

"The US has a strong case" against China in "alleging(ing) that China persists with discriminatory policies that favour local companies and penalise foreign firms," as economist George Magnus notes in Red Flags, recommending that the US engage China in a dialogue to encourage the latter to open up "market access in non-politically sensitive commercial and service-producing sectors" through avenues such as the US-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue.

Mr Magnus' suggestion of dialogue through existing institutions is a far wiser route for America to take than Mr Trump's trade war. If the Trump administration were to focus its economic campaign against China on the areas of these unfair practices, it would generate a great deal of global support for this campaign. Indeed, the WTO provides many avenues to do so

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

There is a growing perception in China and beyond that the real goal of the Trump administration is not just to eliminate these unfair trade practices but also to undermine or thwart China's long-term plan to become a technological leader in its own right.

Although the US has the right to implement policies to prevent the theft of its technology, this should not be conflated with its efforts to thwart China's long-term, state-led industrial plan, Made in China 2025, designed to make China a global competitor in advanced manufacturing, focusing on industries like electric cars, advanced robotics, and artificial intelligence.

Both Prof Feldstein and Mr Magnus agree that in order to maintain supremacy in high-tech industries like aerospace and robotics, the US government, rather than pursuing tariffs, should invest in areas such as higher education and research and development. In short, America needs to develop its own long-term economic strategy to match that of China.

However, to work out a long-term strategy, America needs to resolve a fundamental contradiction in its economic assumptions.

Most sophisticated American economists believe that government-led industrial policies do not work, arguing instead for free-market capitalism. If this American belief is correct, Mr Lighthizer should not oppose China's 2025 government-led plan to upgrade its technological capabilities. He should sit back and allow this Chinese industrial initiative to fail, as the Soviet Union's economic plans did.

However, if Mr Lighthizer believes that the 2025 plan could succeed, he should consider the possibility that America should revisit its ideological assumptions and, like China, formulate a long-term comprehensive economic strategy to match the Chinese plan.

Even Germany, arguably the world's leading industrial power, has such a strategy, called Industry 4.0. It's obviously less intrusive than the Chinese version of industrial policy, which, as Mr Scott Kennedy of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies has described, involves the state playing "a significant role... in providing an overall framework, utilising financial and fiscal tools, and supporting the creation of manufacturing innovation centres". Why can't the US formulate a plan to match?

Ironically, the best country that the US could work with in formulating such a long-term economic strategy might well be China. China is keen to deploy its US$3 trillion (S$4 trillion) reserves to invest more in the US.

America should also consider participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The countries currently participating in BRI would welcome US participation, as it would help balance China's influence.

Just as Boeing and GE, two major American corporations, have benefited from the explosion in the Chinese aviation market, firms like Caterpillar and Bechtel could benefit from the massive construction undertaken in the BRI region.

Unfortunately, America's ideological aversion to state-led economic initiatives will prevent both mutually beneficial long-term economic cooperation with China and needed industrial strategies in the US.

As China rises, America faces two stark choices. First, should it continue with its current mixed bag of policies towards China, with some seeking to enhance bilateral relations and others effectively undermining them? On the economic front, with the exception of Mr Trump's latest trade war with China, American policies have consistently treated China as a partner, while America's political and especially military policies have most often treated China as an adversary.

Second, can the US match China and develop an equally effective long-term strategic plan to manage the latter's rise? The simple answer is yes.

However, if China is to be America's No. 1 strategic priority, as it should be, the obvious question is whether America can be as strategically disciplined as China and give up its futile wars in the Islamic world and its unnecessary vilification of Russia.

It was rational for the US to have the world's largest defence budget when its economy dwarfed every other in the world. Would it be rational for the world's No. 2 economy to have the world's largest defence budget?

And if America refuses to give this up, isn't it a strategic gift to China? China learnt one major lesson from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Economic growth must come before military expenditure. Hence, it would actually serve China's long-term interests for the US to burn money away on unnecessary military expenses.

If America finally changes its strategic thinking about China, it will also discover that it is possible to develop a strategy that will both constrain China and advance US interests.

GLOBAL RULES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Mr Clinton provided the wisdom for this strategy in a speech at Yale University in 2003, when he said, in short, that the only way to manage the next superpower is to create multilateral rules and partnerships that would tie it down.

For example, though China lays claim to reefs and shoals in the South China Sea, the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention has prevented it from declaring the entire South China Sea an internal Chinese lake.

China has also been obliged to implement WTO judgments that have gone against it. International rules do have bite.

Fortunately, under President Xi, China is still in favour of strengthening the global multilateral architecture the US created, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the UN and the WTO.

China has contributed more UN peacekeepers than the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council combined. Hence, there is a window of opportunity for cooperation between America and China in multilateral forums.

To seize the opportunity, American policymakers have to accept the undeniable reality that the return of China (and India) is unstoppable. Why not? From the year One to 1820, China and India had the world's two largest economies. The past 200 years of Western domination of global commerce have been an aberration. As PricewaterhouseCoopers has predicted, China and India will resume their No. 1 and No. 2 positions by 2050 or earlier.

The leaders of both China and India understand that we now live in a small, interdependent global village, threatened by many new challenges, including global warming. Both China and India could have walked away from the Paris Agreement after Mr Trump did so. Both chose not to.

Despite their very different political systems, both have decided that they can be responsible global citizens. Perhaps this may be the best route to find out if China will emerge as a threat to the US and the world. If it agrees to be constrained by multiple global rules and partnerships, China could very well remain a different polity – that is, not a liberal democracy – and still not be a threatening one.

This is the alternative scenario that the "China threat" industry in the US should consider and work towards.

• This commentary is an edited version of an article first published in Harper's magazine.

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OBITUARIES

With Deepest Sympathy and Heartfelt Condolences to The Family of the Late



NADIAH BINTE ZAINAL

Departed on 24 January 2019

She will be fondly remembered by
Management and Staff of
Changi General Hospital

Changi General Hospital
SingHealth

SingHealth DukeNUS ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTRE

"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety." Psalm 4:8



Peter Rita Antoinette

Age: 61

Was called home to the Lord on 26 January 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Stanislaus Irudayasamy
Late Father: Pakiasamy Peter
Mother: Reginamary Peter

Brothers:
Antony Xavier Peter
Vincent Paul Peter
Gerard Victor Peter
Francis John Peter

Sisters-in-law:
Doris Ooi
Chiang Lai Heng
Poonam Pawani
Neo Hwei Shan

Sisters:
Patricia Josephine Raj
Margaret Rose Peter

Brother-in-law:
Thomas Joseph Raj

Nephews, nieces, grandnephew, grandnieces, all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Block 466 Hougang Avenue 8 #08-1526, Singapore 530466.

Night prayer will be held at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Monday 28 January 2019 at 2.30pm for Funeral Mass at Church of the Nativity of the B.V.M. at 3.00pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 5.15pm.

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23



Yvonne Louise Fletcher

Age: 82

Was called home to be with the Lord on 26 January 2019.
Together with her Beloved Julian.

Fondly remembered by:
Siblings: Doreen, Maureen, Gabriel and Francis
In-laws, nephews, nieces, grand-nephews, grand-nieces and all loved ones.

Yvonne is resting at the Holy Spirit Oratory, Church of the Holy Spirit, 248 Upper Thomson Road, Singapore 574371.
Wake visiting hours: 10.00am to 10.00pm.

Funeral Mass on Wednesday 30 January 2019 at Church of the Holy Spirit at 2.00pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 3.45pm.





34th Anniversary



MAMERT STANLEY FERNANDEZ
called home to be with the Lord on 27 Jan 1985

Dearest Papa,
34 years have passed and your absence is still deeply felt.
Our love for you still endures in the memories we cherish.
Only you can understand our love & pain.
We miss you.

Always remembered by Wife, Sons, Daughters-in-law & Grandchildren

---



"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 1:14



Fong Yew Sam

Age: 92

Was called home to be with the Lord on 25 January 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Dr Grace Lim (deceased)
And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at 61A Greenwood Avenue, Singapore 289267 from Monday 28 January 2019, 10.00am onwards with Night Prayers at 8.00pm.

Final service on Tuesday 29 January 2019 at 9.30am, thereafter cortege leaves at 10.40am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 11.40am.

No wreaths please.

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Invest



Me & My Money

Finance veteran Gary Harvey says equities in his portfolio are one of the asset classes that help hedge against inflation. B12

Revisit your CPF options to get the best out of them

The retirement sum increases annually to keep up with inflation, so consider topping it up early to optimise your savings



Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

There is no better time than the start of a new year to take stock of our finances and evaluate our goals and budget, including running the rule over the low-risk option of Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings.

CPF retirement sums increase annually to keep up with the inflation, so it is worth considering top-ups to boost our nest egg. To help you better plan for your retirement, the CPF Board has outlined the retirement sums applicable to members turning 55 from 2016 to 2020 in advance. The Sunday Times highlights what CPF members can do to optimise their retirement savings.

Members turning 55 this year

1. TOPPING UP FOR FUTURE HIGHER PAYOUTS

When members turn 55, a CPF Retirement Account (RA) is created. Savings from their CPF Special Account (SA) and Ordinary Account (OA), up to the Full Retirement Sum (FRS), will be transferred to their RA to form their retirement sum.

You can withdraw up to $5,000 of your OA and SA savings even if you are unable to set aside your FRS. This will provide monthly payouts when they reach their eligibility age, which can be deferred up to 70.

The higher the retirement sum, the higher the monthly payouts. The FRS for members turning 55 this year is $176,000, which gives them a payout of $1,350 to $1,450.

Members who own a property can choose to set aside the Basic Retirement Sum (BRS). The BRS for members turning 55 this year is $88,000. Any amount above the BRS can be withdrawn after 55.

If you want to receive higher payouts, you can top up your RA up to the prevailing Enhanced Retirement Sum (ERS) of $264,000, which gives you a payout of $1,960 to $2,110.

The above payouts are estimates based on CPF Life Standard Plan computed as of 2019. Do note that payouts may be adjusted to account for long-term changes in interest rates or life expectancy. Such adjustments (if any) are expected to be small and gradual. Top-ups can be done via cash or CPF transfers.

2. TOPPING UP FAMILY MEMBERS' CPF

Members who are looking at helping their spouses build up their retirement savings can transfer CPF savings above their BRS of $88,000 to them. When it comes to top-ups for parents and grandparents, members can transfer their balance CPF savings after setting aside their BRS of $88,000, with sufficient property charge/pledge to make up their FRS of $176,000.

This charge is created when you use your CPF savings to pay for your property. It secures the refund of your CPF savings used for the property and the interest you would have earned on those savings when you sell, transfer or otherwise dispose of this real estate.

A CPF property pledge is created on your property when you pledge it to withdraw your Retirement Account savings above your Basic Retirement Sum. The pledge secures the refund of the pledged amount when you sell, transfer or otherwise dispose of the property.

3. SERVICING HOUSING LOANS

If you are still paying off a mortgage, you can use your retirement savings in excess of the prevailing BRS of $88,000 for this.

You can also use your OA savings to pay for the house.

In addition, members can write in to the CPF Board to request to set aside their OA savings for housing from age 54.

Therefore, these OA savings will not be used to form their retirement sum.

However, members' monthly payouts from age 65 will be reduced with a lower retirement sum being set aside.

4. USE OF CPF TO FUND KIDS' EDUCATION

Members who are still financing their children's education loan using CPF savings will have to set aside the FRS or the BRS with sufficient property charge/pledge in the RA before they can use their Ordinary Account savings for education purposes, up to the available withdrawal limit under the CPF Education Scheme.

Members who have set aside the FRS or BRS with sufficient CPF property charge/pledge in the RA can consider waiving the education loan repayment. This means the student will not need to repay the outstanding education loan.

Members who are over 55

1. TOPPING UP FOR FUTURE HIGHER PAYOUTS

Members in this age group can still top up their RA up to the prevailing ERS – which is three times the BRS – in their RA. By doing so, they can expect higher monthly payouts.

Note that members over 55 are getting an additional 1 per cent interest on the first $30,000 of their CPF savings, making 6 per cent interest a year. This is on top of the 1 per cent extra interest on the first $60,000 in CPF combined balances, which every member enjoys.

CPF member Cecilia Siow, 61, has been topping up her RA to each year's prevailing ERS since 2016, when ERS was first introduced.

She kicked herself for not doing it early in 2018, and did it at the start of this year, without forgetting again. "As a colleague reminded me, do so at the start of the year and in one lump sum so that the retirement savings can start earning the interest earlier," she says.

2. CPF VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION SCHEME

Ms Siow also contributes to her three CPF accounts (Ordinary, Special and Medisave) via the CPF Voluntary Contribution Scheme, which is capped at $37,740 each year. This is to boost her nest egg as the mandatory CPF contribution rates from her employer go down after 55.

The maximum amount of voluntary contribution under this scheme is the difference between the cap of $37,740 and the amount of mandatory contribution received for the year. The excess contribution above the cap will be refunded without interest. Note that the voluntary contribution is non-tax deductible.

You can use the CPF Contribution Allocation Calculator on the CPF Board's website to find out how much is allocated to each of the three CPF accounts.

Any Medisave contributions in excess of the member's Basic Healthcare Sum (BHS) will be transferred to the SA for members aged below 55 if they do not have the prevailing FRS, and to the RA for members aged 55 and above if they do not have the cohort's FRS or BRS with sufficient property pledge/charge. Otherwise, the excess CPF contribution will be transferred to the OA.

3. TOPPING UP FAMILY MEMBERS' CPF

If you want to help your spouse build up his or her retirement savings, you can transfer savings above your cohort's BRS to him or her. Members can make top-ups to parents and grandparents by transferring their balance CPF savings after setting aside their cohort's BRS with sufficient property charge/pledge to make up their cohort's FRS.

Members aged below 55

1. TOPPING UP FOR FUTURE HIGHER PAYOUTS

Members below age 55 are not allowed to top up to ERS but they can top up their SA up to the prevailing FRS of $176,000.

2. TOPPING UP FAMILY MEMBERS' CPF

Members looking to help their spouses build up their retirement savings can transfer CPF savings above the prevailing BRS of $88,000 to them. When it comes to transfers to parents and grandparents, members can move balance CPF savings after setting aside the prevailing BRS of $88,000, with sufficient property charge/pledge to make up the current FRS of $176,000.

Tax reliefs

If you use cash (rather than CPF transfers) to top up your SA to FRS, not only do you stand to earn attractive CPF interest, but you also get a tax relief of up to $7,000.

You get an additional tax relief of up to $7,000 if you top up specific family members' CPF via cash. They include spouse, siblings, parents, parents-in-law, grandparents and grandparents-in-law.

For spouse and siblings, their annual pay in the year of the top-up cannot exceed $4,000 or they should be handicapped. Note that there is no tax relief for top-ups beyond the prevailing FRS, and tax relief is limited to the $80,000 personal income tax relief cap.

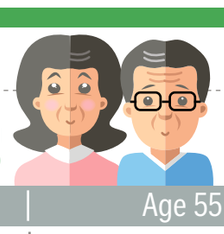
New modes for top-ups

Instead of downloading CPF forms or going for Giro, regular top-ups can be done by using the mycpf mobile app, which offers a convenient avenue, even on the go. You can also make a top-up easily through PayNow QR. The CPF Board said cash top-ups to yourself and your loved ones can be credited in just one working day.

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• Join Invest Editor Lorna Tan for her talk on retirement planning via CPF at Agape Village, multi-purpose hall, level 1, 7A Lorong 8 Toa Payoh, from 7.30pm on Feb 22. To register, please e-mail agapevillage@caritas-singapore.org or call 68017400.

How retirement sums compare



For members turning 55 in 2019 and 2020



	Age 55 in 2019		Age 55 in 2020	
	RA savings required at 55 ($)	Monthly payout from 65 ($)	RA savings required at 55 ($)	Monthly payout from 65 ($)
If you own a property and choose to withdraw your RA savings above your BRS (subject to sufficient CPF charge/pledge)	Basic Retirement Sum (BRS)			
	88,000	730 - 790	90,500	750 - 800
If you do not own a property or choose not to withdraw your RA savings above your BRS	Full Retirement Sum (FRS)			
	176,000 (FRS is 2 x BRS)	1,350 - 1,450	181,000	1,380 - 1,490
If you wish to put more savings in CPF Life	Enhanced Retirement Sum (ERS)			
	264,000 (ERS is 3 x BRS)	1,960 - 2,110	271,500	2,010 - $2,160

NOTES: • Payouts are estimates based on CPF Life Standard Plan computed as of 2019. • CPF Life payouts are for life.

Topping up early

	Top-ups in January ($)	Top-ups in December ($)
	($7,000 per year)	
Top-ups over 10 years	70,000	70,000
Interest earned over 10 years*	21,574	17,802

NOTES: *Based on current Special Account interest rates of up to 5% per annum and $0 starting CPF balance.
• You maximise the interest you earn by topping up early.

Source: CPF BOARD SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Confused about CPF payout age? All you need to know

The retirement sum you set aside in your CPF Retirement Account will be used to provide you with monthly payouts once you reach your payout eligibility age. This is 65 for those born from 1954.

Recently, some CPF members were confused as to when they could start receiving their monthly payouts.

About six months before you turn 65, the CPF Board will inform you that you can start your monthly payouts by completing an application form with your bank account details or to apply online. Your payouts will start from your birthday month.

Starting from this year – for those who turn 65 – you will also be invited to attend a CPF Retirement Planning Service session where you can learn about the options you have upon reaching payout eligibility age, such as how you can start your payouts as well as how you can increase the payouts.

If you are still working or have other sources of income, you may not want to start your payouts at 65. So you can choose to begin the payouts at any time between ages 65 and 70.

Do note that if you do not submit your application to the board between the ages of 65 and 70, your payouts will automatically start at the age of 70.

Members who defer the start of their payouts will benefit from getting more retirement savings with the attractive interest that they earn on their CPF savings. In fact, for every year that you defer, your CPF Life payouts will increase by up to 7 per cent.

Lorna Tan

Comparison of payouts

Start payout at	Monthly payout for life ($)
65	730 to 790
66	780 to 830
67	820 to 880
68	870 to 940
69	920 to 990
70	970 to 1,050

Note:
• Payouts are estimates based on a member who has set aside the Basic Retirement Sum of $88,000 at age 55 and CPF Life Standard Plan payouts computed as of 2019.
• For every year that you defer, your CPF Life payouts will increase by up to 7 per cent.

Source: CPF BOARD
SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

How are CPF rates computed?

The interest rates for Ordinary Account, Special Account (SA) and Medisave Account (MA) are reviewed quarterly.

CPF ORDINARY ACCOUNT

It will earn either the legislated minimum interest of 2.5 per cent per year, or the three-month average of major local banks' interest rates, whichever is higher.

SA AND MA

Savings in SA and MA earn either the current floor interest rate of 4 per cent a year or the 12-month average yield of 10-year Singapore Government Securities (10YSGS) plus 1 per cent, whichever is higher.

RETIREMENT ACCOUNT (RA)

The interest rate for RA is reviewed annually. RA funds credited each year will be invested in newly issued Special Singapore Government Securities (SSGS) which will earn a fixed coupon rate equal to either the 12-month average yield of the 10YSGS plus 1 per cent computed for the year, or the current floor rate of 4 per cent a year, whichever is higher.

The floor interest rate of 4 per cent is extended until Dec 31 this year in view of the continuing low interest rate environment.

Lorna Tan

Tips on CPF top-ups

TOP UP EARLIER IN THE YEAR

Make a top-up earlier in the year to earn more interest and benefit from compound interest.

Let's assume you regularly top up your Special Account by $7,000 a year for 10 years – a total of $70,000. If you had performed the top-up in January, the total interest earned (based on the current SA interest rate of up to 5 per cent per year) over 10 years of $21,574 is higher than the $17,802 interest from topping up in December.

DO TOP-UPS IN SMALL AMOUNTS

If topping up in a lump sum is too much of a stretch, you can still make small but regular top-ups. Consider allocating a portion of your monthly pay to your CPF account. Do it automatically through Giro so as not to forget and to avoid the year-end rush.

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BlackRock's Michael Fredericks says growth in the US has appeared to be resilient and has markedly outperformed the rest of the world. A healthy level of growth will persist through this year, he says. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Fund manager interview series

Managing funds with a risk budget in mind

Michael Fredericks, head of income investing for the BlackRock Multi-Asset Strategies group, discusses his market outlook in our series featuring fund managers and market experts.



Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

Mr Michael Fredericks and his team are responsible for portfolio management, risk monitoring and tactical asset allocation across global income strategies.

He joined BlackRock in 2011 from JPMorgan Asset Management, where he was an executive director and portfolio manager in the Global Multi-Asset Group (GMAG) responsible for retail asset allocation solutions.

At JPMorgan, he co-managed the JPMorgan Diversified Fund and the JPMorgan Income Builder Fund, and served on the GMAG New York investment committee. Before that, he was an equity analyst responsible for global consumer discretionary stocks at Nicholas Applegate Capital Management.

Mr Fredericks holds a Bachelor in Economics and History degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Master of Pacific International Affairs from the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego.

Q *Tell us about the Dynamic High Income Fund. What is the fund's investment strategy and how does it set itself apart?*

A The BGF Dynamic High Income Fund is a globally diversified, tactical strategy that seeks to provide a high current income stream which is meaningfully above what's available through traditional income strategies and asset classes.

We believe it is unique in that it seeks to generate a significant portion of its yield from complementary, more difficult to access/manage, sources of income. Therefore, the fund generally does not overlap significantly with existing traditional income sources (for example, core bonds, dividend-paying stocks) often already present within investor portfolios, offering not only additional diversification but potentially higher yield than most traditional asset classes. Simply put, the Fund offers a complementary approach to enhancing an investor's income potential.

Q *What guides your asset allocation? How do asset classes such as global real estate investment trusts (Reits), mortgage-backed securities and preferred stocks complement traditional income investments in the hunt for yield?*

A We manage the fund with a risk budget in mind. This means that, in pursuit of our income and total return objectives, we try to keep portfolio volatility in line or below that of a blended risk benchmark of 70 per cent MSCI World Index/30 per cent Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Bond Index USD Hedged.

This helps ensure that we are appropriately balancing the competing trade-offs between income and risk.

My team is responsible for the top-down tactical asset allocation decisions and we use both quantitative and fundamental processes to develop our investment views.

We also collaborate extensively with asset-class specialists across the firm for bottom-up research and individual security selection within the fund. It's also worth noting that, on a daily basis, we utilise BlackRock's industry leading risk-management platform (Aladdin) and group (Risk and Quantitative Analytics – RQA) to help us fully understand the fund's risk profile.

A key tenet of the fund is expanding the opportunity set beyond traditional sources to potentially achieve a higher income. We intend to invest the majority of the fund in complementary income sources.

Generally speaking, these asset classes offer investors higher income potential as well as diversification benefits. A recent example of this includes the mortgaged-backed securities (MBS) held in the fund which performed strongly during the fourth-quarter equity sell-off with some MBS sectors even positive over the quarter.

Another compelling market is preferred stocks. They behave like bonds but because they have equity features the yields tend to be higher than other fixed-income sectors and they often have a fixed-to-floating rate structure.

Lastly, Reits provide a number of compelling income opportunities across sectors and geographies with lower correlation to stocks and bonds.

Q *In the light of today's rising rate environment and market volatility, how do you ensure you generate a sustainable income?*

A A global, multi-asset approach means we are not reliant on a single income source to meet our objectives. Thus, we have several asset-class capabilities that could potentially help us deliver a competitive income in a variety of markets. Additionally, rising interest rates and higher volatility often create new opportunities to earn higher income for tactical managers.

Q *The market has seen a sell-off following geopolitical developments such as growing US-China trade tensions, political uncertainty in Italy and crises in certain emerging markets. What are the likely investment implications?*

A Geopolitical risk is the highest it's been in years and appears unlikely to abate anytime soon. The likely implications of all this means there is a wider range of outcomes moving forward and it's reasonable to expect more frequent bouts of volatility, similar to what we experienced in the last three months of last year.

The positive, however, is markets have begun to reflect these potential risks as valuations across most asset classes have been pushed lower. This is in stark contrast to the start of last year when many markets were priced to perfection. I'd also add that markets ultimately care about economic fundamentals, which still seem relatively healthy from our standpoint.

Q *Which asset classes and markets are you looking at, and why? Do you see more bright spots or is it all doom and gloom?*

A It's certainly not all doom and gloom. But I think it's safe to say that we are transitioning to the later stages of this economic cycle and recent forward-looking data has been a touch softer. Broadly speaking, our base case remains that the global economic expansion is set to continue through 2019, supported largely by the strength of the US economy.

This underpins our belief that you are still paid to take on economic risk and our preference for US assets. We also feel that focusing on areas that provide consistent cash flow and are less reliant on capital appreciation to generate returns seems like a reasonable approach at this stage.

We continue to uncover attractive opportunities for income through covered calls on individual stocks. The higher volatility backdrop has led to higher call premiums and thus better income levels for covered call investors. We have generally preferred US growth-oriented sectors in this part of the portfolio, avoiding the bond proxy names, yet we have been rotating exposures into more defensive sectors.

Outside of equities, multiple areas of fixed income repriced last year, creating a more balanced outlook going forward, in our opinion. As an example, prices across high-yield, investment-grade debt, emerging markets debt and preferred stocks are down 8 per cent on average over the last year. Notable exceptions to the repricing theme are areas like commercial MBS and non-agency MBS.

These sectors outperformed in 2018, underscoring the benefits of diversification. However, as valuations are now relatively high, it makes it more difficult to meaningfully add to these sectors.

Q *What are the key investment themes or trends that you foresee for 2019? What are the key risks to look out for, and how can investors reduce their exposure to these?*

A In the US, growth has proved resilient on the back of last year's tax package and has markedly outperformed the rest of the world. While the acceleration in US economic activity may be behind us, we believe that a healthy level of growth will persist through this year.

However, we are no longer in a world of global synchronised growth and believe that multiple cross currents could lead to regional discrepancies. The underperformance of non-US markets has been notable and has weighed on overall investor sentiment.

The Federal Reserve appears closer to the end than the beginning in their tightening cycle. We expect rates to remain "lower for longer" but it is clear that much uncertainty abounds over where the neutral rate lies in the long run and to what extent, if at all, the Fed will tighten its policies this year.

We added duration to the portfolio in the fourth quarter of last year, which helped bolster returns. Tactically adding duration at attractive yields can help add ballast against higher equity volatility.

Uncertainty around trade remains one of the biggest known macro risks. We are closely watching company earnings and full-year guidance from management, particularly as it relates to how companies' supply chains may be impacted by global trade developments.

Tariffs might just be the tip of the iceberg in a shift towards more regionalised economies, which could have a big impact on companies' business models. We continue to advocate for a high degree of flexibility and diversification to better manage these macro risks.

Q *What keeps you awake at night?*

A As a parent, I worry about my teenage children. As a portfolio manager, there is no shortage of risks today that could make any investor toss and turn at night and occasionally I fall victim to this. However, I trust our approach and find comfort in knowing we have the backing of BlackRock's global investment and risk platform to help us navigate current market trends and risks.

Q *If I am not a fund manager, I would be ...?*

A A Formula 1 driver.

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5 TIPS FOR INVESTORS

1. Cash flow the long-term winner

During the era of loose monetary policies, price return won for many asset classes. But in normal times, it is important to remember income streams and steady cash flows are the big return winners over time.

2. Be global and diversified

Do not be reliant on a single income source. Diversification allows you to have several ways of meeting income objectives in a variety of markets.

3. Be flexible

Rising interest rates and higher volatility often create new opportunities for tactical managers to earn higher income.

4. Look beyond traditional assets

Many income opportunities exist beyond traditional markets in areas that can offer both higher income potential and diversification benefits.

5. Keep an eye on risk

In more volatile markets, it is important to balance the competing trade-offs between income and risk.

Lorna Tan

Post-retirement investing: How much to put in and take out



A downturn early in your retirement years can hurt your portfolio, but good returns early in retirement can really help



Genevieve Cua

There is a wealth of literature and products to help you save for retirement but not much is written on how to ensure you don't outlive your resources.

How will you invest your assets for the years when income from work ceases? How much can you withdraw to ensure you don't outlive your savings? What happens if there is a major downturn just as retirement begins?

Large fund houses in the United States such as JP Morgan Asset Management (JPAM) have begun to offer products that cater to the "decumulation" phase – that is, when the portfolio still needs to be invested, but investors withdraw an income at the same time.

BlackRock expects to launch a product in the United States this year, "but the technology and framework will work in Singapore too", the group's chairman and chief executive, Mr Larry Fink, said when he was in Singapore late last year.

"As people live longer, the fact that we historically thought we should be in bonds only when we retire is crazy," he noted.

"But the key is not just asset allocation. Wouldn't you feel better if we can tell you how much money you'd earn every month in decumulation phase?"

In Singapore, unit trusts are generally designed for the accumulation phase, although there are funds with an income objective. Some funds indicate a yield objective such as 4 per cent or 5 per cent, and distributions are made accordingly, even if it means dipping into capital to fulfil the distribution objective.

The insurance sector does offer a number of options for those who want to plan for an income withdrawal in retirement. These are generally structured as endowments, where you can choose the premium payment period and the age at which withdrawals begin.

You can choose the duration of income withdrawal. The endowments are par or participating products, which means the funds are collectively invested by the insurer, and policyholders typically receive a combination of guaranteed and non-guaranteed returns.

The attractions of an endowment are that the policy's mechanism of smoothed returns shield investors from volatility, and there is the comfort of a guaranteed component of returns. It will be costly, however, to use endowments for the bulk of retirement income needs.

Here are some risks to plan for:

LONGEVITY

As Singaporeans live longer, how many years in retirement should you plan for? JPAM's research on Singapore retirement says there is a 56 per cent chance that a 65-year-old couple could live past 90 and a 7 per cent chance of living past 100. It says if you have a family history of longevity, you should conservatively plan for 30 years or more of living expenses.

There is a silver lining, however. Ms Wina Appleton, JPAM Asia Pacific retirement strategist, says the typical rule of thumb of planning to replace 70 per cent of your last drawn pay is simply "not true".

Drawing from the Department of Statistics' Household Expenditure Survey, it finds that household expenditure peaks at around 50 and begins to decline at a faster pace at 55.

"The spending needs are very different in retirement. The good news is people spend less," she says. This is partly because children become financially independent and the household size becomes smaller.

CPF Life alone is not sufficient to maintain your lifestyle in retirement. Hence, private savings are needed.

The higher your household income, the lower the income replacement ratio, although the absolute amount to be replaced is higher. Based on JPAM's analysis at around age 60, the household expenditure is estimated at roughly $4,000 a month.

JPAM has come up with an indication of how much savings you should have built up at your current age in order to maintain a similar lifestyle in retirement.

The calculations assume 2 per cent inflation a year, annual returns of 5.5 per cent, annual contribution to savings of 10 per cent and a 30-year withdrawal period.

For example, a 40-year-old couple today with monthly household income of $10,000 will need to have capital of $410,000.

The capital sum at age 65 is estimated at about $1.4 million, which assumes a monthly withdrawal for the next 30 years at a 60 per cent income replacement ratio, discounted back to age 65. The actual accumulated sum at 65 should be around $2 million when inflation is taken into account.

Providend chief Christopher Tan uses a proprietary framework RetireWell to calculate retirement needs. In its system, funds are invested into buckets. There is an income bucket for immediate income needs, which is invested conservatively. Other buckets have progressively longer horizons and can take on more risk.

"What all this means is that with a higher return on investment at retirement age, and lower income needed in later years, the lump sum required at retirement is lower," he said. "But, in our experience, most clients prefer a higher income stream in the early years of retirement while they are strong and healthy, so they can do what they have always wanted to do, such as travel, while opting for a lower income later."

The sequence of return risk is one reason that, when you are near or in retirement, it is prudent to have more assets in lower-risk investments.

INVESTMENT RISK/ SEQUENCE OF RETURN RISK

This is the risk that you are hit with poor returns in the first few years of retirement.

Based on calculations by the Capital Group, assuming an investment of US$500,000 (S$680,000) in the S&P500 and monthly withdrawals of US$20,000, the actual chronological order of return between 1999 and 2014 would result in a relatively poorer outcome, as the investor was hit with a market downturn in 2000-2002 from which the portfolio never recovered.

If the return picture was reversed – that is, the return of 2014 happened in 1999 and so on – the outcome would be much different. The portfolio would end with a value of US$566,000 compared with US$213,000 in the actual chronological order.

Capital Group investment director Andy Budden says: "The lesson is that a downturn early in retirement can hurt, but good returns early in retirement can really help. The reason is that so much of the person's total portfolio is held in the market at that point and so is subject to market forces.

"Similarly, very late in retirement, a huge portion of the previous portfolio value has been spent or withdrawn so a market downturn can't affect it."

The sequence of return risk is one reason that, when you are near or in retirement, it is prudent to have more assets in lower-risk investments. In any case, a downturn early in portfolio when an investor has begun to withdraw for income means that the portfolio has to make up for both the market decline and withdrawals.

"If a strong upturn doesn't restore the portfolio, subsequent fixed-amount withdrawals will represent a greater percentage of the remaining portfolio. Often this is not sustainable and the portfolio begins a downward trend that can be irreversible," says Mr Budden.

Still, Mr Bradley Vogt, portfolio manager of the Capital Group, maintains there is a place for equities post-retirement: "We think investors in retirement can't just go into cash, but they need the right types of stocks."

These include blue chips with stable higher dividends.

WITHDRAWAL RATE

Most retirement studies posit a withdrawal rate of 4 per cent or 5 per cent. JPAM advocates a flexible approach taking into account market returns.

In its post-retirement product SmartSpending in the US, Ms Appleton says the firm gives advice annually on how much can be withdrawn. "We have a target spend-down year where the portfolio becomes zero. Annually we give advice on how much we think can be withdrawn to stay on track."

Mr Vogt says withdrawal rates will depend on the "total life picture".

"There are fundamentals. One looks at the yield of the portfolio and thinks of an amount that corresponds to the yield. If you take out more than that, you hope capital appreciation will make up for it," he adds.

"In recent times, interest rates have been so low; equity markets were high, and dividends low. If you do a 4 per cent programme, you need to hope markets keep going up."

Retirees who are willing to draw down completely on the portfolio should be able to enjoy a higher withdrawal rate.

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As Singaporeans live longer, how many years in retirement should you plan for? Research says there is a 56 per cent chance that a 65-year-old couple could live beyond 90 and a 7 per cent chance of living past 100. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



How initial coin offerings can reinvent themselves



While improved methods of raising capital for blockchain start-ups such as initial coin offering versions of securitisation, loan procurement and staged financing are still in their infancy, and examples of start-ups choosing these alternatives are limited, innovations like these represent the future of fund raising for blockchain start-ups. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Securitisation, loan procurement and staged financing are some methods ICO firms can explore to win investor confidence

Emir Hrnjic and Nikodem Tomczak

In late May, Singapore regulators clamped down on initial coin offerings (ICOs), ordering one issuer to stop the offering of its digital tokens and eight exchanges to cease trading these tokens.

Although the Monetary Authority of Singapore did not publicly name the issuer involved, it said the move was to halt the issuing of digital tokens that resembled securities or futures contracts, but which did not follow the legal procedures required of regular securities and futures.

This has caused some observers to wonder about the future of this innovative fund-raising method in what had become the largest ICO market in Asia.

In 2017, start-ups raised roughly US$5 billion (S$6.8 billion) worldwide through ICOs, surpassing traditional venture capital funding and transforming the early stage fund-raising landscape. Yet in the same period, roughly half of the attempted ICOs failed to get off the ground.

Many blockchain companies have focused solely on developing the technology, hoping that the tech alone will drive market adoption. However, as it became clear that a sizeable majority of ICO companies either could not deliver on their promises or simply never had any intention of doing so, disgruntled investors have led calls for stronger regulation.

Reinventing ICOs

To meet these demands and reduce the risk of fraud and failure, how can ICOs reinvent themselves to win investor confidence?

The long history of finance theory and practice provides useful hints. For example, securitisation, loan procurement and staged financing have been successfully used for public and private companies for decades.

Can these well-established methods serve as prototypes in the blockchain environment? What are the pros and cons of these security designs? Finally, can they be modified and adapted to blockchain companies?

The answer is simpler than it seems.

SECURITISATION

Based on the concept of securitisation of assets, profits or revenues generated by blockchain companies, the Security Token Offering method represents a regulated ICO that strictly complies with finance laws.

The benefits are improved efficiency, liquidity and transparency, and often include certain features such as proxy voting.

Since any investment including real estate, stocks, bonds, commodities and even infrastructure projects can be securitised (or tokenised), the market value for tokenised securities could potentially reach hundreds of trillions of dollars.

While securitisation provides investors with more assurance, as securities have clearly defined intrinsic value and the company is required to disclose investment risk, newly issued tokens require an underwriter as well as compliance with laws and legal requirements.

LOAN PROCUREMENT

Another innovative way to raise funds for blockchain companies is through initial loan procurement – a method that allows blockchain start-ups to enter loan agreements with creditors through smart contracts.

Just like in a typical loan agreement, the issuer has a legal obligation to return investor funds plus pre-determined interest over the maturity of the loan.

Unlike other methods, they are typically more tax efficient and compliant than ICOs and token holders become creditors since they lend money to a company.

It has other advantages in that it is regulatory compliant and the loans are not subject to tax. Further, the immutability of blockchain technology provides confidence to creditors.

STAGED FINANCING

Well-known in the venture capital playbook, the staged financing method consists of two different phases: the fund-raising phase, where the start-ups raise funds; and the fund disbursement phase, in which the funds are released to entrepreneurs after reaching predetermined milestones.

Similarly, its blockchain counterpart – Decentralised Autonomous ICO (Daico) – serves to mitigate some of the shortcomings of standard ICOs by enabling investors to influence how the ICO funds are spent.

It does this by including provisions that the ICO company would have to reach agreed targets before accessing portions of raised funds. In cases where it does not, investors would be able to vote on a refund.

By giving investors control over the funds, this approach limits the possibility of a scam and ensures that the project developers sustain both their motivation and accountability.

Finally, just like staged financing, Daico alleviates risks for investors.

What's next

With many ICO start-ups failing to deliver on their promises, the crypto community is focusing its attention on how to eliminate fraud, comply with regulations and boost investor confidence.

At the same time, the growing interest of institutional investors in ICOs is fuelling demand for better regulations and improved governance. This increased scrutiny is pushing potential ICO issuers to strengthen their technical development teams with legal, finance and business professionals.

The likely consequence is further development and adoption of improved methods of raising capital for blockchain start-ups such as ICO versions of securitisation, loan procurement and staged financing.

While these methods are still in their infancy and examples of start-ups choosing these alternatives are limited, innovations like these represent the future of fund raising for blockchain start-ups.

For investors, keeping abreast and informed of these rapidly evolving models will be the key to success.

• Emir Hrnjic is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Asset Management & Research Investment at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School. Nikodem Tomczak is a research scientist and adjunct associate professor at NUS.

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Mr Gary Harvey, the chief executive at St James's Place Wealth Management here, believes in the importance of seeking objective financial advice from a professional. He has an adviser to handle his investment portfolio to match his risk profile, time horizon and retirement objectives, while active management is left to fund managers. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Me&MyMoney

Planning retirement to hedge against inflation

Finance veteran who saw the value of his dad's pension ruined prefers to turn to expert guidance



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Finance veteran Gary Harvey takes retirement planning very seriously, something he has his father's bad experience to thank for.

"Inflation is a curse," says Mr Harvey. My father saw the value of his pension destroyed by inflation in the 1980s in a very short time.

"It impacted his lifestyle and he had to take up work after retirement."

The chief executive at St James's Place Wealth Management here is a firm believer in the importance of seeking objective financial advice from a professional to achieve long-term goals in life.

St James's Place is a London-listed wealth management company operating in Britain, China (Shanghai, Shenzhen and Beijing), Hong Kong and Singapore. It works with clients to help them achieve their financial goals.

Instead of employing in-house investment managers, St James's Place provides access to a carefully selected group of external fund managers who are monitored by the firm's investment committee.

The committee is, in turn, supported by independent external consultants who are selected for their expertise in particular areas of the investment world. They help devise investment strategy and develop St James's fund range.

Mr Harvey, 57, says the firm also guarantees the suitability of the advice given by its advisers when recommending any of the wealth management solutions and services available from companies in the group.

"We believe that this gives our clients the added peace of mind and assurance that they are receiving the best advice possible to meet their financial needs," he says.

The group's funds under management total £96.6 billion (S$172 billion), and it has 3,810 advisers worldwide, with about 120 in Asia.

Before joining St James's Place, Mr Harvey held CEO appointments at Nexus Financial Services, ipac Wealth Management, Asia, and AXA Life Insurance, Singapore.

He lives alone in Singapore, while his 25-year-old daughter is in Britain and has just finished the final year of her law degree.

Q *What's the next stage of growth for your businesses?*

A St James's Place entered the Singapore market by acquiring a business that was focused on expat advisory. Since then, we have started to build a strong Singaporean team using a holistic advisory process.

Our emphasis over the next few years is to establish our Singaporean client base as more clients become aware of the importance of an advice-based process rather than the product-sales approach that we see in the market today.

We will do this by growing the talent pool within our organisation, both in terms of quality partners and employees. We recently launched our Singapore Graduate Programme and welcomed our first intake of three Singaporean graduates who are joining us on a structured two-year rotation programme as part of our commitment to developing future management talent.

While building our Singaporean business, we will also continue to grow our strong position in the expatriate market, where we have distinctive competences, given our UK parentage and experience.

Q *What's in your personal portfolio?*

A I have mutual funds and pure life insurance, and they include globally diversified managed portfolios, MediShield and term insurance.

My adviser handles my investment portfolio to match my risk profile, time horizon and retirement objectives, while I leave the active management to fund managers.

I don't focus on the annual returns. I believe in the power of a portfolio of diversified assets combined with time and patience.

Q *What are your immediate investment plans?*

A I will continue to build assets for my retirement and pay down debt on my property. It is located in Kovan and was bought in 2017.

Q *How did you get interested in investing?*

A Having been in financial services for 30 years, it seems like my life!

I chose to work in this sector because I saw the importance of what the financial advisory industry does to improve people's lives by helping them achieve the dreams for their family, whether it be a comfortable retirement, a home to live in, education for their children and having peace of mind in case things go wrong.

Q *Describe your investing strategy.*

A There are four aspects in my strategy:

- Equities play an important role in my portfolio as they are one of the asset classes to help hedge against inflation. Good capital growth can be achieved through time and patience as well;
- Diversification of managers and assets is key as I don't like concentration of assets or taking bets;
- Long-term investing is important as I don't monitor my investments too often – at the maximum, once or twice a year; and
- Ignore market noise of today and trust the experts who invest my money as I can't know more than them.

Q *What else is in your financial plan?*

A I have a savings plan for my daughter and a universal life plan. As the costs and range of medical treatments increase, having good coverage becomes increasingly important as well. I am also making sure my plans are not dependent on my employer's scheme.

Given the age of my daughter, I hope that cash flow starts coming the other way.

I like to buy the occasional 4-D and Big Sweep tickets for a bit of fun, knowing that the proceeds go to fund the Community Chest, an organisation that we work with on our payroll giving programme.

In addition, I have a will that I keep updated.

Q *How are you planning for retirement?*

A I'm not sure if I will ever stop working. A career break a few years ago proved to me how important work is to me as I love the social interaction and the pleasure and sense of achievement from a career.

Obviously, I want to maintain my lifestyle into retirement, but inflation is what worries me the most – the way inflation even at a low level can destroy your spending power.

Q *Home is now ...*

A A cluster landed, four storey-house in Kovan, conveniently located and within walking distance to eateries, shopping and the MRT. It is about 3,600 sq ft in size and has three bedrooms, a study and a basement.

Q *I drive...*

A A red Ford Mustang.

lornatan@sph.com.sg

Worst and best bets

Q *What has been your biggest investing mistake?*

A It was an investment I made in the early 1990s at the time of the German unification, on the back of expectations of growth predicted by many market watchers. The investment did nothing for five years. It fell in value, despite predicted increases and was not in line with overall global markets. I can't remember how much it was but it was a lot to me at the time.

I learnt the danger of investing too much in one particular asset class (concentration risk), especially in country- or sector-focused investments. I also realised the need for a professional manager and a diversified portfolio to ignore market noise and speculation and focus instead on building long-term value.

It is also prudent to ignore market tipsters. Every year, many predictions are made about where to invest – most are wrong, yet people only ever talk about the ones who are right and get lucky.

Q *And your best investment?*

A My retirement funds are invested in global balanced portfolios with the equities exposures unhedged. I wanted investments that were well diversified across all the different stock markets, asset classes and industries, but with a large allocation to equities to hedge against inflation.

Currency movements can be volatile over the shorter term, so my portfolio will include mostly equities with a global exposure and that removes the need for currency hedging through diversification. The funds have given solid, consistent returns over the last 10 to 15 years despite the many ups and downs.

I receive good advice from a financial planner and refrain from watching the asset values too frequently and from getting worried during market downturns such as the 2008-9 financial crisis.

Lorna Tan

FinancialQuotient

What is forex trading?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Foreign exchange (forex) trading involves the simultaneous buying of one currency and selling of another.

It is hence carried out in currency pairs. For example, you may want to buy Japanese yen while selling the United States dollar.

If the yen appreciates against the US dollar, you make a profit by closing your trading position, which is to sell yen and buy back US dollars at the same time.

The actively traded currencies are the US dollar, yen, euro, British pound sterling, Swiss franc, Australian dollar and Canadian dollar.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The forex market presents an attractive opportunity for investors to trade in a highly liquid market.

It is open 24 hours a day during weekdays and the global turnover is more than US$5 trillion (S$6.8 trillion) a day.

We may sometimes see advertisements marketing forex trading programmes as a get-rich-quick investment tool. It is important to understand the pros and cons of forex trading before venturing into it.

One of the pitfalls is the use of leverage in forex trades, which can lead to large losses as well as gains.

IF YOU WANT TO USE THE TERM, JUST SAY:

"It is prudent to practise forex trading on a dummy account before opening a live account."

Lorna Tan

Life

C

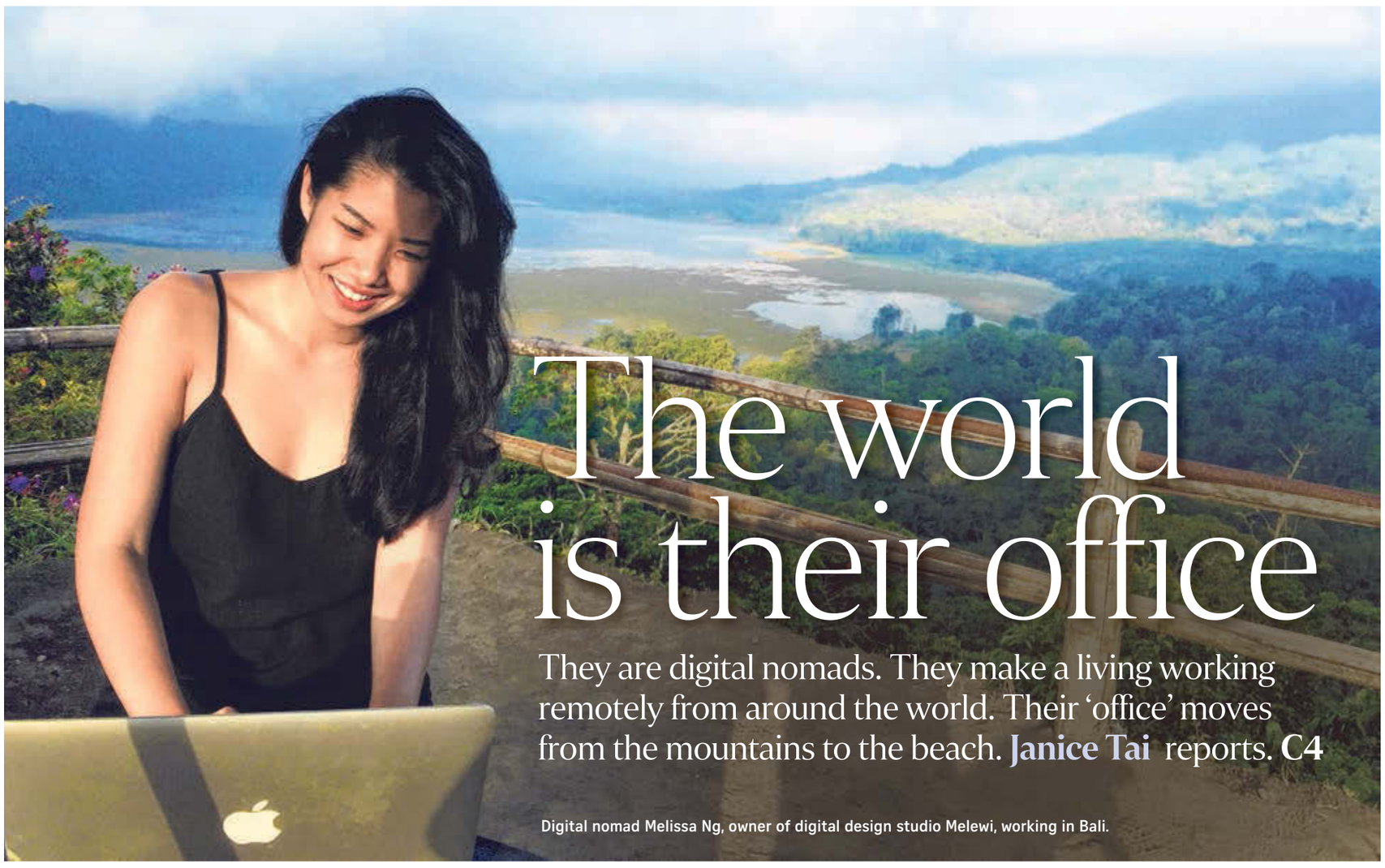
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Eunice Quek picks the best CNY snacks
C14&15



Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.

– Charles R. Swindoll

Live more, Bank less



The world is their office

They are digital nomads. They make a living working remotely from around the world. Their 'office' moves from the mountains to the beach. **Janice Tai** reports. **C4**

Digital nomad Melissa Ng, owner of digital design studio Melewi, working in Bali.

Confessions of an escape room junkie
Why Janice Heng does it
C2&3



Snowy mountains, hot salty butter tea
Lee Siew Hua goes glamping in Yunnan
C8&9



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Si Chuan Dou Hua @ UOB Plaza
Reservation no.: 6535 6006

Silk Road Restaurant
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Reservation no.: 6384 5585

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Reservation no.: 6836 3088

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Reservation no.: 6297 2262

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Official Beef: National Beef
Official Imported Seafood: Delicasea
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Choose your own escape

Escape room operators continue to innovate, rolling out games inspired by well-loved animation and including features such as VR



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

For people who are not escape room enthusiasts, being locked in a dark, themed room and having to race against time to crack puzzles to get out can be a scary and claustrophobic experience.

While that is the typical escape room scenario, escape room operators here are adding fresh twists to their offerings.

For instance, Xcape Singapore has two games inspired by a Hollywood cartoon and a Japanese manga series that the company says are family-friendly.

Another operator, Trapped, has put a Singaporean spin on its escape game by fashioning it after national service.

And who says escape games have to take place in a small room? Why not on a mobile truck, or even in a virtual world?

The move to create more diversity in their game offerings is due to competition and the need to get customers to return for more, says Mr Gary Lin, course manager for the diploma in marketing at Temasek Polytechnic's School of Business.

With several escape room companies sprouting up here – a quick search on the Internet shows at least seven operators – the industry is becoming more competitive.

Mr Lin says: "Whether the companies continue to do well depends on how innovative they are and their marketing strategies cater to different target segments.

"It is only expected that these companies develop multiple themes and products."

The Sunday Times checks out some of these unusual escape rooms.

bang@sph.com.sg



In Trapped's game, Escape From Pulau Tekong, players have to find their way out of a national service-themed room. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

FOR BARGAIN-HUNTERS

Trapped

Located in teen hangout "Scape, its rooms are among Singapore's cheapest and also offer special student rates.

Not surprisingly, Trapped's escape game, titled Escape From Pulau Tekong (left), is a hit with full-time national servicemen and NSmen. After all, Pulau Tekong is where most of them were sent for basic military training and probably learnt about the island's infamous ghost stories.

In the game, players have to find their way out of a national service-themed room, passing through an army bunk and surrounded by military props and gadgets.

Staying true to the army experience, a player has to crawl through a tunnel to retrieve a clue.

Trapped, in operation since 2013, introduced the game in late 2017. Mr Hendra Harjuna, 37, one of Trapped's directors, was inspired by his experience serving national service in the early 2000s.

"There are numerous stories and folklore about what army men experience on Pulau Tekong," he says.

"Some found the training tough, others made friends and still others found the place scary since it has many forested areas and is away from mainland Singapore.

"We found these ideas interesting and so developed the escape room around this theme."

He hopes the concept will let NSmen reminisce about their past experiences and give non-Singaporeans a chance to see what most Singaporean men go through.

"We understand players' expectations have increased over time, so we need to evolve and constantly upgrade our new rooms with state-of-the-art gadgets and props."

TRAPPED

WHERE: 02-20 "Scape, 2 Orchard Link

WHEN: 11am to 10.30pm (Mondays to Thursdays), 11am to 2am (Fridays to Sundays). The place will be closed at 10pm if there are no bookings made for games after that time.

ADMISSION: $18.90 to $28.90 a person

So much to do locked in a room



Janice Heng

Some seek an escape from the daily grind through Netflix, yoga or retail therapy. My escapist pleasure of choice is more literal. For the past few years, I have spent many weekends exploring ruined temples, trespassing into science labs, solving murder mysteries or travelling through time – all thanks to Singapore's many escape rooms.

The uninitiated may have a vague impression of these as dim, claustrophobic lairs – no thanks to the horror films that have used them as a plot point – or something only reality-avoiding nerds could enjoy. Yet the beauty of escape rooms is that they combine meaningful socialising with intellectual thrills and pure escapism.

After all, if you are going to have an escapist hobby, you might as well go all the way. Like video games or movies, you are transported somewhere else, but unlike those forms of entertainment, escape rooms allow you to be the protagonist of your own adventure.

For me, escaping a room with friends is more rewarding than silently watching a movie together or complaining fruitlessly about work over drinks.

Through this hobby, I have rekindled old bonds and forged new ones, while discovering hidden talents in my friends and myself: I now have plenty of options if I had to assemble a laser-beam-dodging heist team, for instance. And nothing tests a group's rapport and communication skills quite like having to explain a sudden brainwave under time pressure, or conveying code-breaking information to a teammate in a different room.

Communication and teamwork are not the only "transferable skills" honed by this hobby.

The puzzles encountered call for lateral thinking, pattern recognition, logic, observation or hands-on problem-solving, allowing you to exercise mental faculties that might have been gathering moss otherwise.

They are also arguably a much healthier form of escapism, grounding you in the physical world rather than alienating you from it. It is hard to be more in the moment than when you are exploring a suddenly revealed secret passageway, or feverishly keying in the final code with just minutes left on the clock. Some rooms even let you get some exercise, through climbing ladders or crawling through tunnels.

And even while providing an escape from the mundaneness of everyday life, escape rooms appeal to the competitive instinct familiar to many a kiasu Singaporean. In those 60 minutes, cut off from the outside world, you get to experience the rush of competition with none of the consequences that normally accompany deadlines.

The sense of triumph when you emerge victorious is no less real just because the game takes place within an imagined narrative.

Visiting escape rooms while on holiday has also proven a fun way to discover cultural differences, whether it is New York City's tendency to group strangers together, Tokyo's intricate and wordplay-heavy puzzles, or Budapest's unbridled creativity, from "rowing" a boat under a waterfall to being rescued by a "bird" with the final key in its beak.

Whether you are seeking camaraderie, mental and physical exercise, adventures, or a sense of achievement, you can find them behind the locked door of an escape room. This is a hobby that I have no plans to leave.

janiceh@sph.com.sg

• When not breaking into bank vaults or dodging zombies, the writer is an economics correspondent at The Business Times.

FOR DIGITAL NATIVES

The virtual reality escape room game at Lockdown SG. ST PHOTO: BENSON ANG



Lockdown SG

Screen-swipers will be at home with the tablet-enabled rooms here. It even offers a virtual reality escape room for a fully digital experience.

So you have overcome every escape game in the real world. Now it is time to conquer the virtual dimension.

Since March last year, Lockdown SG has been offering a virtual reality (VR) escape game at its two outlets. It involves escaping from an abandoned mine where oxygen is quickly running out.

In the one-hour game, participants put on VR headsets, hold a controller in each hand and their game avatar can perform a range of actions, such as squatting, pushing buttons, picking up objects and solving puzzles.

The headsets offer them a 360-degree view of their surroundings – from dark, shadowy walls to rusty metal pipes to flickering lamp lights and floor patterns.

The VR dimension allows players a more immersive experience compared with real-life escape rooms, says Mr Jonathan Ye, 34, a director of Lockdown SG, which was started in 2013.

"It allows for more elaborate puzzles, such as scare elements that would otherwise have a certain amount of risk in the physical world," he says.

For example, in VR, it is easy to let "creatures" leap out from corners to scare players, he adds. "If you wanted that in real life, you would have to hire a scare actor."

The game, which uses a VR system called HTC Vive, can accommodate up to six players. They can move around in a 3m by 3m physical space and their avatars move in the virtual space largely by teleporting from one spot to another.

Another Lockdown SG director, Mr Zoltan Jakab, 34, says: "If you walk outside the physical boundaries, an in-game barrier will appear, indicating for you to turn back. Very rarely do you get players walking into a physical wall while playing the game."

So far, the response has been encouraging, with a quarter of their customers opting for the VR game.

On Thursday, it will offer a second VR game lasting two hours and themed around illusions and dreams.

Mr Ye says: "I think customers want new experiences in their escape games and I am confident VR presents a new element for them to keep coming back."

LOCKDOWN SG

WHERE: 02-02 Orchardgateway, 277 Orchard Road; and 02-11 JCube, 2 Jurong East Central 1

WHEN: 11am to 10pm daily

ADMISSION: $24 to $30 a person (VR escape rooms); $22 to $25 a person (regular escape rooms)

FOR THE ADVENTUROUS

The Kung Fu Panda X: The Return Of Tai Lung room where players take on the role of little pandas who solve puzzles to stop a villain from stealing a scroll. PHOTO: XCAPE SINGAPORE



Xcape Singapore

Special effects abound in Xcape's varied rooms, whether you are looking for a magical time, training to be a gongfu master or hoping to star in a horror movie.

Not all escape rooms are dark and mysterious. At Xcape Singapore, two of its rooms are brightly decorated with cheery cartoon characters.

Since December 2015, the company has offered family-friendly rooms at Xcape Funtasy, one of its four outlets.

In one game, Kung Fu Panda X: The Return Of Tai Lung, players take on the role of little pandas who solve puzzles to stop a villain from stealing a scroll from the Valley of Peace. It is inspired by the Kung Fu Panda trilogy of Hollywood animated films.

Those below 14 years old can play too if accompanied by a paying adult aged 18 or older.

The other game, Mission X: The Love Confession, is inspired by the popular Doraemon manga series. Players have to overcome challenges to confess their love to a girl and give her a bouquet of flowers.

Recommended for couples, friends and families with children, the game lets players exercise their imagination, while reliving childhood memories. They have to be aged 12 or older or be accompanied by a paying adult.

Ms Daphne Teo, 33, a co-founder of Xcape Singapore, which was set up in 2013, says that to stand out, the rooms at Xcape Funtasy are well-lit and focus on surprise and fun elements. Lights, music and special features – such as a gongfu training room and a movable door that can take players to "another world" – are deployed.

"As escape rooms become mainstream entertainment, we want everyone to be able to enjoy them, even those who are scared of being locked in a dark room, younger kids or couples on a date."

She adds that quite a few birthday parties and marriage proposals have been staged at Xcape Funtasy. Ms Teo says: "The overwhelming reception to these rooms has led us to introduce other niche concepts, such as Xcape Haunted, which focuses on thrilling, scary escape rooms; and Xcape RPG, where participants take on personas in a given situation, with proper costumes and scripts."

XCAPE FUNTASY

WHERE: Level 3, 152B Rochor Road

WHEN: 11am to 11.30pm daily

ADMISSION: $22 to $28 a person (minimum of two players for Mission X and three players for Kung Fu Panda X)

Other player types

FOR BEGINNERS
CAPTIVATE ESCAPE ROOMS
Clearly clued puzzles make some of Captivate's rooms ideal as an introduction to the game. Consider Black Out, Zero Hour or Kellar's Magic Emporium.
Info: www.captivateescaperooms.com

FOR WEEKEND WARRIORS
THE ESCAPE ARTIST
Three of the four rooms at its Sentosa Gateway outlet require teams to climb, crawl or scramble, providing both a physical and mental workout.
Info: www.theescapeartist.sg

FOR THE COMPETITIVE
ESCAPE HUNT SINGAPORE
It has two identical copies of each room, making it ideal for teams that want to race against each other.
Info: singapore.escapehunt.com

FOR THE YOUNG-AT-HEART
FREEING SG
Among the secrets hidden in Freeing's rooms are certain thrills and spills that might remind you of your playground days.
Info: freeingsg.com

FOR LARGE TEAMS
LOST SG
There is no risk of claustrophobia with expansive rooms, most of which can take up to 12 players each.
Info: lost.sg

Collab and Conquer, a museum-themed escape room built into a 7m-long truck, was developed by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Kult, a collective of multidisciplinary artists. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR



New escape room in a mobile truck

Singapore's latest escape room, launched yesterday, is built into a 7m-long truck. And it is free.

This museum-themed escape room, called Collab and Conquer, was developed by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Kult, a collective of multidisciplinary artists.

The ministry touts it as the latest effort to strengthen cohesiveness among people here, regardless of nationality, race or religion. It does so by letting individuals collaborate in a group of up to six, including strangers, to solve a mystery.

The game's premise is that a $3-million painting by Singaporean artist Chris Chai has been stolen from a museum a day before it is to be revealed, in what is billed as the country's biggest art heist.

The culprit is possibly a curator, artist or security guard. Players are given a handful of clues and have 30 minutes to find the artwork.

The mobile truck will travel to different places around the island over the next month.

Mr Chen Hsin Yeow, 43, MCCY's deputy director of corporate communications, says: "Collab and Conquer is one of many things MCCY does to engage Singaporeans to build a caring, cohesive and confident nation."

In the activity, he notes, participants have to solve challenges and get to know one another better.

Mr Raja V., 53, director of Kult, says: "As you experience the game, you will find that different people have different skill sets, which is great. They realise that there is this need to work together."

Ms Liyana Hidhir, 25, who works in a creative agency and played the game last Tuesday, says: "Even though I played it largely with strangers, the experience was not awkward for me. I generally have an open mind about meeting new people.

"In an indirect way, it honed in on the message that even though we are among people we don't know, we might have to work together for a common goal at times."

To participate, sign up at bit.ly/collabandconquer. According to the organisers, the response has been very positive, with some sessions fully booked. The escape room also accepts walk-in players.

COLLAB AND CONQUER

WHERE: Plaza Singapura (until Friday), Raffles City (Saturday and Feb 3), Hillion Mall (Feb 4 to 10), Our Tampines Hub (Feb 11 to 17)

WHEN: Till Feb 17, 2 to 8pm (Mondays to Thursdays), 2 to 10pm (Fridays), noon to 10pm (Saturdays), noon to 8pm (Sundays)

ADMISSION: Free

Raising standards for safe play

Following the deaths of five teenage girls in Poland while they were playing an escape game earlier this month, at least one escape room attraction in Singapore has reviewed its emergency measures.

A fire had broken out in the escape room venue where the 15-year-olds were playing and they reportedly died of smoke inhalation.

Xcape Singapore, which has four outlets, says it is looking into improving these measures.

Ms Daphne Teo, 33, one of the business' co-founders, says it is creating an emergency evacuation briefing video, similar to those shown on flights, that participants have to watch during briefing sessions on the games.

"The incident (in Poland) has reminded us of the importance of fire safety," she says.

At Xcape Singapore, there are CCTV cameras and walkie talkies in each room, so the staff are aware if guests need assistance, she adds.

Other escape room attractions say they have high safety standards.

Mr Jonathan Ye, 34, a director of Lockdown SG, says: "Both our two outlets are located in shopping malls and we adhere to the fire safety regulations that allow players to safely evacuate in an emergency."

He adds that all its escape rooms are monitored by CCTV cameras and players can communicate with staff, or call for help using an iPad in the room.

"If they encounter an emergency, they can type a message using the iPad and our staff will see it and react quickly."

Safety regulations may not be the same for other providers that operate in offices or shophouses, he adds.

"Although we have had feedback that escape games overseas can be more exciting – with players jumping down... to a lower level and crawling through tight spaces, it can mean a lower level of safety."

WHO NEEDS A CUBICLE?

More people are choosing to lead digitally nomadic lives – tapping technology to work remotely from anywhere in the world



Janice Tai
Social Affairs Correspondent



Like many Singaporeans, Ms Melissa Ng wakes up daily at 7am, lazes in bed for a bit, then prepares breakfast.

However, that is where the similarities end.

By 9am, she gears up in ski clothes and hits the slopes in Shiga Highlands in Japan. At noon, she stops for a quick lunch in the mountains.

After lunch, she is back in her hotel room, checking e-mail messages and getting some work done before handling team, client and sales calls for the afternoon.

At night, she gets more work done while having dinner before turning in by 11pm.

Prior to Japan, the 28-year-old stayed at a dog-sledding kennel with 130 dogs in the arctic circle in Norway as a volunteer dog handler.

"In general, my work calls with my international staff team are always between 2 and 6pm Singapore time. That never changes no matter where I am," said Ms Ng, owner of digital design studio Melewi.

Her lifestyle is typical of that of a digital nomad – people whose work is not tied to a location and who can travel and work remotely by tapping technology.

There are millions of such nomads roaming the earth and their ranks are expected to grow.

Estimates by the MBO Partners State of Independence Research Brief last year found that 4.8 million Americans described themselves as digital nomads and many more – 17 million – aspire to the nomadic life.

There is no official data on such workers in Singapore, but a Facebook group created in 2015 called Singapore Digital Nomads has about 600 members.

Nomad List, an online subscription community for international nomads, has about 30 people from Singapore signed up on it.

An online survey of 1,000 Singaporeans commissioned by money transfer service TransferWise last year found that 69 per cent of respondents want to work remotely to travel the world. Among younger Singaporeans aged 15 to 34, 74 per cent want to do so.

Top reasons cited were that they felt they could find a better quality of life and living environment elsewhere and were looking for different experiences.

Labour Member of Parliament Patrick Tay said the ranks of digital nomads in various industries have grown as a rising number of jobs and services can be done and delivered virtually.

He added that such a model of work provides flexibility, autonomy and empowerment to workers.

"Where the job can be delivered online or virtually, we will expect to see our local firms offer or create these positions so as to tap talent and manpower in a tight labour situation," said Mr Tay.

TransferWise said its survey highlights that younger Singaporeans seek a lifestyle that allows them to work remotely and travel the world for greater work-life balance, mobility and international exposure.

"However, the digital-nomad lifestyle presents challenges, including in the areas of finance, logistics and accommodation," said Mr Nicholas Lembo, TransferWise's head of marketing and communications for the Asia-Pacific region.

Certainly, digital nomads agree there are downsides too.

There are practical concerns, such as the need for stable Wi-Fi connection and the costs of international money transfers.

The expenses of constantly being on the go can add up.

Ms Ng's company, Melewi, for instance, paid more than $6,000 in bank fees for international money transfers last year, though the cost went down later when she used services by TransferWise.

She said: "It's all about managing money well, such as cooking and eating in and going out only during the weekends. I spend more living in Singapore than I do travelling."

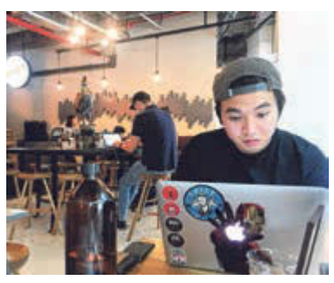
It can be lonely too.

"The lives of you and your loved ones develop in different directions and, suddenly, they have bought a house and started a family and you missed the whole thing. That's rough," said Ms Ng.

Such a lifestyle is also not feasible for those who wish to start a family.



> **It's all about managing money well, such as cooking and eating in and going out only during the weekends. I spend more living in Singapore than I do travelling.**
>
> **MS MELISSA NG, owner of digital design studio Melewi** (above, during a trip to India last year), on leading the life of a digital nomad



Mr Eddy Chan, head of product at a start-up called QLC, working at a cafe in Melbourne in 2016.

Mr Edmund Ng, 40, director of video production and marketing company Reelmedia, says he broke up with three girlfriends as they wanted to marry and have children.

He has been working and travelling around South-east Asia since he founded his company in 2010.

He takes about two trips of four to seven days each a month, spending the rest of the time working from home or at a cafe in Singapore.

"It can get tiring, especially when you have projects to complete, but are stuck in a traffic jam or your flight is delayed," said Mr Ng.

The irony is that such a way of life can get so tiring or stressful that sometimes digital nomads may wish they had an office to go to.

Mr Eddy Chan, 27, head of product at a start-up called QLC, started such a lifestyle in 2016, when his colleagues had to leave Singapore due to visa issues and the team began working remotely in various countries.

In the past two years, he has travelled and worked in 11 countries, staying for at least two weeks in a new city each time.

He has had days when he spent quite some time just to find a suitable cafe to work in – one with stable Wi-Fi, conducive ambience and affordable coffee.

He said: "That friendly water-cooler chat with your colleague is way too underrated."

A nomadic life sounds romantic, but it requires good time management, routine and discipline.

Mr Ng said: "I set regular work hours and wake up and sleep at the same time wherever I am."

Ms Nicole Tan, 29, owns digital marketing firm Pink Tangent and works while backpacking around the world.

She said: "When I was in Jamaica last year, I did all my work from Tuesdays to Thursdays so that I could go to Blue Hole, a cavern within the mountains, on Fridays, when it was the least crowded.

"When I was in Slovenia, I worked in the day until 3pm so that I could dress up and go to a student festival in the evening."

For those who do not mind solitude and constant change, the wandering lifestyle can be wonderful.

Ms Ng has visited more than 30 countries in the eight years since she adopted a nomadic way of life.

She usually stays in each country for one or two months. Some of the more memorable experiences she has had include a road trip in a converted ambulance in Belize, Central America, and trekking the Himalayas in Nepal and India.

Ms Tan has been to at least 25 countries since she started working while backpacking around the world 10 years ago. Her shortest stay was one day, while the longest was four months.

The rewards of being a digital nomad include having a "new office" every day, meeting new people and having varied experiences.

She said: "Working in a company in Singapore has often been too restrictive for me and I find that people don't trust their employees.

"So, this is my way of choosing how I want to live and work. Is it rebellious? Possibly."

Mr Edmund Ng (above, at a resort in Siargao, the Philippines), director of video production and marketing company Reelmedia, has been working and travelling around South-east Asia since he founded the company in 2010.
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF EDMUND NG, MELISSA NG AND EDDY CHAN

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SCAN TO WATCH
The beach is his office
http://str.sg/nomad

Successful ageing



Dr Tan finds joy in learning new skills during his retirement. PHOTO: TED CHEN

The joy of learning

Retired professor Tan Thiam Soon continues to learn during his retirement, thanks to the National Silver Academy

Joshua Wong

After 30 years of teaching, Dr Tan Thiam Soon finally gets a chance to be on the other side of the desk.

The 75-year-old retired National University of Singapore professor of business is an advocate of lifelong learning.

In the past year, he has taken a variety of courses at the National Silver Academy (NSA), a network of post-secondary education institutions and community-based organisations that offers a wide range of learning opportunities to seniors at a subsidised rate.

From mindfulness training to magic tricks, these courses have enriched his life and helped him find many new friends.

"Learning new things is always a joy. I have met people with similar interests, and we still keep in touch via WhatsApp groups," he says.

Dr Tan has stayed active since he hung up his academic gown in 2000.

After retirement, he completed a six-year course in traditional Chinese medicine, after which he put his knowledge to use, performing acupuncture on patients at the Chung Hwa Medical Institution in Toa Payoh.

In recent years, he has also travelled more. His retiree wife has taken up painting, and she goes on overseas excursions with her classmates to places like Myanmar, Sri Lanka and China. And Dr Tan tags along.

In late 2017, he started taking NSA courses. These courses are organised by Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and administered by the Council for Third Age (C3A), an agency that promotes active ageing in Singapore.

The courses range from information technology and business, to art and wellness.

Singaporeans aged 50 and above receive a subsidy of up to 50 per cent of course fees (if offered by a post-secondary education institution), with further subsidies available for courses run by community-based organisations such as Family Central and Brahm Centre.

MINDFULNESS AND MAGIC

Dr Tan's first course was on mindfulness at Brahm Centre.

Although the course fees are subsidised for a maximum of three courses from the same provider per year, Dr Tan decided to take four courses on how to practise mindfulness in total as he found it to be a useful skill.

In February last year, he took a five-week-long course on magic tricks offered by the National University of Singapore Society.

His class of 19 seniors were eager learners, and their WhatsApp chat group is continually buzzing, even months after the course is completed.

"Magic is a good way to entertain people, as it is a lot of fun," says Dr Tan.

"I have yet to perform tricks for my granddaughter as she is too young to appreciate them, but I look forward to doing so in the future."

Dr Tan encourages all seniors to try out the NSA courses for themselves. He sees them as a great way to re-experience the joy of learning.

"The subsidies are there for us to use, and there are opportunities to learn. It is up to us to make the most of them."

> Learning new things is always a joy. I have met people with similar interests, and we still keep in touch via WhatsApp groups.
>
> DR TAN THIAM SOON, 75

This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.



Declutter like you're about to be retrenched

If the Kondo spark-joy way doesn't work, get angry and let go of stuff like you're about to be let go. And there's always Swedish death cleaning



Denise Chong

He had just been retrenched. But he had taken steps earlier to make sure his exit was as calm and dignified as he was. He had most likely inadvertently seen the signs of the axe swinging his way and cleared out his desk way ahead of that horrible afternoon.

The others who found out about their fate in a more abrupt manner were tearfully or angrily pulling their things out from drawers and cabinets.

Some had to pick their dignity up from the floor.

The dust rose from the cubicles as they sorted stuff for hours.

They packed up boxes and bags filled with files of keep-them-just-in-case documents, pet and family photos, toys, tchotchkes, gadgets and books.

As for him, he said his goodbyes, and left with a tiny bag of all his stuff and all his dignity.

SPARK FURY

When it comes to decluttering, it is so much more cheery to use the method by organising expert and author Marie Kondo: Keep only items that "spark joy" in us.

With her recently launched Netflix show, Tidying Up With Marie Kondo, reviving interest in her lovely strategy, people are tackling mountains of clutter with renewed vigour.

I really hope that this will do it for you. I enjoy how inanimate objects are thanked in her process, filling us with gratitude.

But what if too many items spark joy for you?

If the things that make you happy are stashed at home, no problem, you can burrow with joy into your cluttered nest.

If the things that make you happy are placed in the office, though, you may be living on borrowed time.

If the Kondo way doesn't work for you and you're looking for another way to push yourself, well, let go of stuff like you're about to be let go.

Spark fury.

With global uncertainties and technological disruptions, the risk of being retrenched is floating all around us like dust.

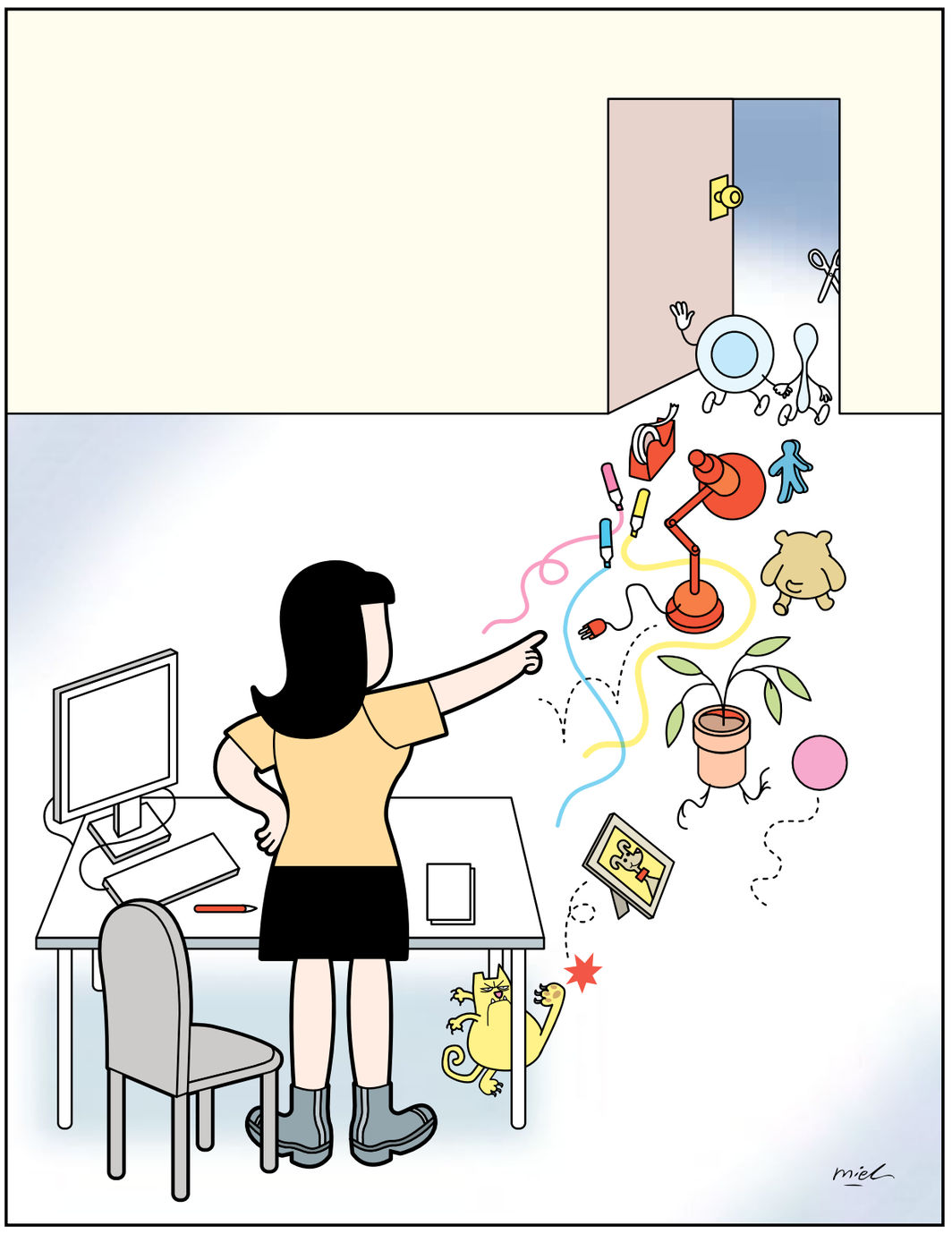
So keep your desk empty and bank account full.

It is easier said than done, of course. I actually fight the urge to make myself feel at home.

We spend such long hours at work.

We sometimes sit next to wonderful, humorous and smart people.

We sometimes even feel like they're family. But sadly, I was reminded that no office is ever your home, not unless you own it, or if you work for the rarest of unicorns – a company that truly treats employees like family.



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

SPARK ACTION

My colleagues and I moved back into a newly renovated office this month and one of them asked me earlier if I would be putting strange and offbeat objects on my desk.

You see, over the years, he had been amused by my cabinet of curiosities.

Decluttering may appear trivial, but it had the curious power to help me move on in personal and professional ways.

I had things like a bonsai (stuffed toy) kitten, poisonous-looking apples, a birdcage, fake sushi, metal wine cups from a Mexican flea market and more on my desk.

For a long time, I felt so at home in the office.

For a long time, though, I steadily got rid of things.

Colleagues working late at night a couple of years ago would have seen me wearing gloves and a determined expression, digging inside my cabinet for stuff to get rid of.

When the drawers and cabinet were empty, my heart was full of gratitude. Yes, I like thanking inanimate objects.

Decluttering may appear trivial, but it had the curious power to help me move on in personal and professional ways.

Weigh the pros and cons of your life situation, do the sums, and run through various scenarios. But if you are still stuck, do a little light manual labour by decluttering.

It gets the blood flowing.

It gets me thinking.

The lighter my load, the easier it is to walk away.

SPARK 'CHOY'

If talk of retrenchment hasn't sparked a "choy" or two from you already, this other decluttering method is more likely to do so. ("Choy" is a Cantonese word you utter to ward off perceived bad luck.)

The Gentle Art Of Swedish Death Cleaning, published in 2017, describes a way to declutter and organise your stuff before you die so your loved ones will not be stuck with the stress of doing so.

For example, this bit may motivate you if you have, ahem, very private items you don't want loved ones to see. Before your kids have to empty out your bedroom, "save your favourite (adult toy), but throw out the other 15", wrote author Margareta Magnusson, who described her age as "between 80 and 100".

Not your usual grandmotherly nagging.

Moving swiftly away from not-safe-for-work toys and going back to the office, if I slump over and die at my desk, do I want to leave a huge pile of stuff there for someone to deal with?

If your company needs the desk back soon and family members cannot pack your things in time, is there cubicle clutter you would rather not be eyed by one and all?

Replying to that colleague who asked about my desk objects, I said that I got rid of a lot of things.

Weird and wonderful things have been creeping back onto my desk though.

This makes me uneasy as it means I am feeling too much at home again in the office.

Too much joy.

Time to spark "choy".

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Banking on apps to teach kids about money management

Ann Carrns

Jonathan and Erin Kraftchick started out by giving their two children's allowance the old-fashioned way, using paper money.

"I tried the cash thing," said Mr Kraftchick, an accountant and financial-literacy advocate in Raleigh, North Carolina.

First, they used glass jars, then they switched to a system that involved slipping money for various purposes into separate paper envelopes, for each child.

But keeping up with multiple envelopes became unwieldy.

"It's a lot of hassle," Mrs Kraftchick, an artist, said with a laugh.

So, when Mr Kraftchick read about a "smart" debit card called goHenry last year, he quickly signed the family up for an account.

Now, the children – Reece, eight, and Caris, seven – each has a card, which their parents manage using an app on their phones.

They have US$1 (S$1.35) for each year of age, a week, automatically transferred each week to the cards, which the children can use to buy items such as snacks at their neighbourhood swimming pool.

They can also get more money transferred by going above and beyond – like extra time spent practising the piano.

They can check their balances on an iPad. Mrs Kraftchick said they were even learning to round up prices to include tax.

"It takes the pressure off me," said Mrs Kraftchick, who typically keeps the cards in her wallet and hands them out when it is time to make a purchase.

The Kraftchicks are part of a growing group of busy parents who are trying out app-controlled debit cards to give their offspring allowance, manage chores and teach them about money.

Despite talk of a cashless society, physical cash is still widely preferred for small purchases, according to the United States Federal Reserve. But children may lose cash or parents may not have it on hand when it is time to pay.

"We got tired of having a drawer full of dollars," said Ms Brandi Tzonev, a sales manager and personal trainer in Lawrenceville, Georgia, who uses goHenry with her 15-year-old son, Alex, and 10-year-old daughter, Gabriella.

Some banks have long had accounts aimed at children and teenagers, and many families use prepaid debit cards – rather than traditional debit cards, linked to a checking account – as a way to help children manage money.

But the newest generation of "smart" debit cards are managed by advanced mobile apps that give parents detailed control over how much the young people spend – and even where they spend – with a few taps on a phone.

In addition to goHenry, which has been available in Britain for five years and moved into the US last spring, the cards include financial technology start-ups such as Greenlight, backed by Amazon and others, and Current, financed in part by an arm of Fifth Third Bank.

Details vary slightly by card, but in general, a parent establishes an account or "wallet" linked to their traditional checking account.

The app draws money from the bank account and the parent transfers funds electronically to the child's card.

The child can spend only what is available on the card. Parents can set spending limits and restrict where cards can be used.

Parents can set up regular transfers of cash as a weekly allowance or respond to requests for one-time cash approvals on short notice – if, say, a child is out with friends and needs more money.

Children can also save money in Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation-insured accounts, held at the traditional banks that issue the debit cards on behalf of the start-ups.

The cards charge monthly or annual fees. But they generally do not charge extra fees for loading the card with cash, as some other prepaid debit cards do.

The cards are reviving debates about whether it is best to teach children about money using actual cash and coins and whether children's allowances should be tied to completion of household chores.

The cards also raise concerns about the potential of plastic to encourage overspending.

"Parting with physical cash is harder," said Dr Philip Fernbach, assistant professor of marketing at the Centre for Research on Consumer Financial Decision Making at the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Still, he said, the new digital tools offer ways to help children learn important financial concepts, such as compound interest.

Greenlight, for instance, allows parents to pay children a custom "parent" rate – say, matching each dollar saved with another dollar or two – to encourage saving, at a time when rates on traditional savings accounts are low.

Some say as the use of cash is waning, at least for larger purchases, children need to learn about money in that context.

"That's the world they're in," said Dr J. Michael Collins, faculty director of the Centre for Financial Security at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

If parents find that the apps work well for them, then they should use them, rather than stress that they are "doing it wrong" when teaching their children about money, said Beth Kobliner, author of Make Your Kid A Money Genius (Even If You're Not).

However, she worries that automating so much about finances means sacrificing the chance to have important conversations about spending and saving.

"I'm a real believer in cash," she said. NYTIMES

• The writer is a personal finance columnist at The New York Times.



Ms Angeline Wee (second from left) uses The Game Of Life board game to teach daughter Janelle and son Noel about financial issues.
ST PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Learning about finances through hongbao and games

Experts advise teaching financial literacy to young children and some parents do it with hongbao collections and board games



Venessa Lee



Ms Esther Tan (left) and her husband, Mr Elvin Foong, allow their children Nathan and Phoebe to use three $2 notes from their hongbao collection to shop at $2 store Daiso.

For Chinese New Year last year, Ms Esther Tan and her husband let their children spend three $2 notes from the hongbao (red packet) money they collected.

Nathan, aged seven, and Phoebe, five, were each allowed to buy three $2 items from the Daiso store, while their parents save the rest of the money for them.

The family has found that using notes in small denominations is a tangible and effective way to teach their children about money.

"It's about breaking down financial concepts, such as saving and spending, so kids can understand, using scenarios that are close to their heart," says Ms Tan, 33.

She and her husband, Mr Elvin Foong, 36, are co-founders of The Treasure Box SG, an online site that sells Christianity-based products and services targeted at families.

More complicated uses of money are challenging to explain. When the couple took their children to the bank to deposit their hongbao cash, the kids wondered why the money was being "taken away".

With Chinese New Year around the corner, parents may be mulling over how to guide their children when it comes to hongbao money and other aspects of financial literacy.

One recommendation is to set age-appropriate expectations before the festive visiting begins, says Mr Vipin Kalra, chief executive officer of BankBazaar Singapore, an online marketplace that helps consumers compare and apply for financial products, such as credit cards and personal loans.

He suggests that parents ask preschoolers to hand over their red packets to them, allowing them to save the money on their behalf. Primary school children can be given the responsibility of holding on to their hongbao collection to keep track of how much they receive.

Those in secondary school and older can be given the freedom to decide how they wish to use the red packets, whether to save, spend or donate the money, says Mr Kalra, adding that this would also provide an opportunity to introduce older children to the concept of investments.

Experts recommend broaching the topic of money before children reach Primary 1, when they typically receive an allowance for school.

Ms Ng Hau Yee, director of Junior Achievement (Singapore), which runs programmes in schools focused on educating students about work-readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, says it is important to start financial literacy education (from as young as four to five years old) to cultivate good financial habits.

"How a person feels about money stems from what he is exposed to from the time he is a kid," she says.

She suggests that parents begin teaching preschoolers about concepts such as earning, spending and saving, for instance, by taking them to the market to learn about trade and the exchange of money.

Another important financial concept that children should learn, by the time they reach lower primary age of between seven and nine years old, is distinguishing needs and wants, says Ms Ng.

Parents can guide their children through the family's purchasing decisions. For instance, vegetables, fruit and milk are needs, chocolate is what you might want, she says.

Ms Tan and Mr Foong say that teaching about finances is also a way to impart family values.

For example, when their son Nathan had his birthday late last year, they asked him to set aside about $300 from his birthday hongbao to offset part of the cost of a buffet they had catered for his party.

When his parents told him their rationale, he understood the gesture as "returning the love" of relatives and friends at his party by giving them a treat, says Ms Tan.

In addition, when Nathan wants to give to charity, such as by contributing to donation tins for flag days, Ms Tan might give him some of her spare change, but she takes the same number of coins from his piggy bank when they get home.

Mr Foong says this helps Nathan to understand concepts such as "nothing is free" and that money can be used to benefit others.

Other ways of teaching children financial literacy can be through compartmentalising expenses and playing board games, says Ms Angeline Wee, 48, who works in a statutory board.

She gives each of her three children a plastic container with dividers, which contain the $1.50 they each get every day for school.

"I don't give them too much pocket money so they are forced to make a choice, for instance, between getting a serving of canteen food or buying snacks and sugary drinks," she says.

Her eldest daughter, Primary 6 pupil Janelle Foo, 11, also looks forward to playing The Game Of Life with her parents and her two younger siblings, Noel, eight, and Estelle, 10. The board game portrays life journeys, with milestones such as marriage, children, jobs and retirement.

Janelle says it teaches her about the cost of a home and paying for vacations.

In Ms Ice Lee's family, her children learn what it means to earn money.

Ms Lee, 44, an image professional in the beauty industry, explained to her children Kenneth, nine, and Kathryn, five, that their father had to travel for work to earn money for the household and encouraged them to earn their own money.

They are each given $1 for doing one chore, such as sweeping the floor or washing the dishes.

The couple also encourage the children to save their money in piggy banks.

Ms Lee's husband, Mr Louie Tai, 43, a corporate training consultant, says: "It's important for children to be comfortable with money. You don't want them to be lavish, neither do you want them to be fearful of spending money.

"Money is really a tool. The concept of saving, for instance, helps children think about and dream about the future."

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View near Jinsha Bend.

PARADISE FOUND


A Tibetan wedding couple whose wedding the writer gatecrashed. ST PHOTOS: JAMIE KOH

Shangri-La is the name of a fictional utopia in a 1933 novel. The real Shangri-La, Zhongdian county in Yunnan province, lives up to the reputation



Lee Siew Hua
Travel Writer

I gatecrash a resplendent Tibetan wedding and it is a portal into a joyous, hidden China.

It is my first morning in secluded Shangri-La city, nestled near the Himalayas, and our car is circling a Buddhist stupa.

We spy two young men, stylish in leather jackets, who are firing crackers into a red barrel atop a pick-up truck.

They are off to a wedding, our driver says.

An Alice-in-Wonderland moment is conjured up when we trail the truck, to a place yet unknown. The wedding venue turns out to be a small hotel, where the bride and groom soon emerge from a limousine adorned with miniature woolly yaks and silk.

Then the merriment amplifies with more fire crackers and dancing in the courtyard.

With my two Singaporean travel companions, I mingle with guests clad in vivid garments, the men bearing silver daggers.

Trays of snacks are passed around, and I relish the fragrant roasted barley harvested from highland fields.

TIBETAN REALM

Ringed by snowy mountains, alpine lakes and grasslands, Shangri-La is a Tibetan realm deep inside southwest China.

It rises 3,300m on the Tibetan Plateau, loftier than the more traversed Lijiang and Kunming that are also cities in Yunnan province.

On a recent week-long glamping adventure at The Hidden Valley Resort (*www.thehiddenvalleyresort.com*), set up by four Singaporean childhood friends in a hamlet minutes from the city, I step into the Tibetan world again and again. Almost 80 per cent of the people here are Tibetan.

Spontaneously, we are ushered into a housewarming party where the feast is arrayed on low tables. We follow harvesters cutting red stalks of quinoa under a sparkling sky.

The resort plans experiences rich in local flavour when we visit a Tibetan family and sip hot, salty butter tea – or when we wander in a market where I savour red sugar, spring-onion roots and less-known delicacies.

Then there are the inspiring vistas, from the seasonal lake Napa Hai to a horseshoe-shaped bend on the Jinsha River, as the upper Yangtze is called.

Everywhere, it feels like we have journeyed to a different, distant China.

Every day, we encounter Tibetan open-heartedness, especially when we turn polite gatecrashers on a quest for insider experiences.

GATECRASHING GENTLY

So when we linger outside an outdoor housewarming lunch in an enclave near the Napa Hai lake, the beaming host welcomes us and we are not the only passing foreigners who find ourselves in the middle of a feast.

We sit at low tables with sumptuously dressed Tibetan merrymakers, and plate after tantalising plate of food appear before us.

I delight in the century eggs with a translucent lemon-yellow albumen, stir-fried string tofu and braised minced yak meat, among the dozen exotic dishes.

Then the guests get up to tour the premises, which are embellished with a pond and a small stupa bedecked with prayer flags.

The mansion is all wood and steep steps in the Tibetan style. We see signs of home-building every day – many rugged Tibetans devote years to crafting these dream houses, sometimes with logs hauled from the mountains and help from neighbours.

Spontaneously, again, we pop into a field near our resort when we notice women of all ages striding into a field to clear the succulent ruby-striped stalks of quinoa. It is the first harvest of trendy, profitable quinoa in a zone of highland barley.

It is hard labour but the women appear light-hearted, singing Tibetan tunes and doing a jig for our cameras.

BUTTER TEA, SWEET CALF

We do not have to step far from the resort, at the edge of tiny Bisong Village, to experience lots of local life.

Within Bisong is the three-storey house built by groundskeeper Lao Yeh (Grandfather), as everyone respectfully calls the resort employee who maintains the grounds flawlessly, cares for a pair of small, strong local horses, leads us on an uphill trek to gather fresh pine cones, and more.

At his home, his wife makes yak butter tea. She slices the creamy butter from a slab and churns it with hot water in a bamboo tube.

"Singaporeans are family," she says shyly in Mandarin, as she pours the tea into bowls.

Lao Yeh makes a doughy concoction with tsampa (roasted barley flour) and butter tea, rolling the mixture in his hands. This is the breakfast of champions, a high-energy food with a nutty fragrance that can be eaten all day.

It is like a cultural playtime in their home as we sip potent homemade barley wine mixed with berries. We peer into their grain room, prayer alcove and open hearth, and also notice a washing machine.

A calf, all big eyes and baby fur, is tethered in Lao Yeh's pocket field. It keeps fleeing from me, until the resort's managing director, Ms Cynara Tan, theorises that the calf is triggered by my red jacket.

She lends me her black jacket and the calf draws near, licking me like a puppy.

City-dwellers, I imagine, will capture all the Instagram-worthy scenes of clean and cuddly black piglets, the peaceable dzo (a hybrid of yak and domestic cattle), tall racks of organic barley, chiselled Tibetan faces and other elements of rustic idyll.

HIP HERITAGE

Just beyond the resort is another cluster of lifestyle experiences, in and near town.

We explore the market, Old Town, Songzanlin Monastery and award-winning craft beer factory with a Tibetan twist – all compelling windows into the destination.

In the Old Town, we linger in a chic cafe and buy pu'er tea from a traditional purveyor.

We choose gifts from shops where Chinese snacks are artfully arrayed like library books or stock Tibetan crafts with whimsical touches.

At night, there is dancing in the square. It is lovely to know this appeals to locals young and old, who cherish community life even as Shangri-La modernises with highways that seemingly spring up in weeks.

There is another glimpse of hyperlocal life at the market where I sample goodies, starting with a spicy snack of gelatinous, cold bean noodle.


Shangri-La Old Town (above).


Resort groundskeeper Lao Yeh's wife (left) preparing butter tea for visitors in her house.

At one of the greengrocers, I break off a strand of verdant, white spring-onion roots – it has a clean, pungent flavour just like the familiar green shoots.

We buy vacuum-packed Yunnan dry-cured ham, which costs 50 yuan (S$10) for a half a kilogram. It can enrich a soup or be stir-fried with Chinese cabbage.

Heritage gets hip at the Shangri-La Highland Craft Brewery. Founded in 2009 by Swiss-born Tibetan Songtsen "Sonny" Gyalzur, 45, it is the largest indie beer company in the country.

China's craft beer industry is growing at 25 per cent a year – 3,000 breweries popped up in the last three years – and the trend is propelled by young Chinese sophisticates, he says.

"Our premium beer is integrated into Shangri-La society," he says. "We source pure mineral water from a 4,000m lake. The beer is brewed with highland barley or qingker."

Also, 80 per cent of the staff, including a young deputy, are from his mother's orphanages here and in Lhasa, Tibet, adds Mr Gyalzur, the suave face of the new Shangri-La.

Using German technology, six beers are brewed here, including the popular, robust Black Yak that has coffee bean and dark chocolate overtones.

Limited editions have included the Russian Imperial, thick like Yunnan coffee.

MOON RIVER

Farther afield, I love the sense of purity at the seasonal Napa Hai lake and the contemplative Dongzhulin Monastery with towering butter sculptures and alcoves, including one filled with weapons.

We also make black Nixi plates with a potter who uses 2,000-year-old techniques and lets us pluck pears from his tree.

We also wander in the Xiao Zhongdian village set in a windswept valley.

The Napa Hai is a seasonal lake near Shangri-La. In summer, snow from the mountains floods a series of rivers, turning them into a vast lake. In the November-to-April dry season, the shape-shifting Napa Hai is an endless grassland.

On my late October visit, the lake is still full. It will take an hour to drive around it except that the ring road is flooded.

We sneak up on the animal life on the shores instead – horses with tassles; kinetic rootling piglets; and dzos with curved horns and tinkling bells that intrigue urbanites.

That day, we see the lake again at the golden hour before sunset, when the light is soft and the lake is lustrous.

It is an hour as ephemeral as the lake and great for photography – Chinese tourists with gargantuan telephoto zoom lenses have arrived for the perfect shot but are happy to share the space.

On other days, exhilarating hours are spent at the enigmatic Jinsha Bend, when the Yangtze River loops like a moon or omega sign.

Three mighty rivers of Asia flow here – the upper reaches of the Yangtze, Mekong and Salween.

They are part of the Three Parallel Rivers protected area, a Unesco World Heritage Site of wild gorges and glaciated peaks on the border of Sichuan and Yunnan.

LOST HORIZON

Because weather and road conditions are changeable around Shangri-La, our day-trip plans also change. Due to a landslide, we cannot visit a winery that still uses grapes brought here in the 19th century by French missionaries who walked here from Myanmar, crossing perilous mountains.

Neither can we see the rare Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys in a remote Himalayan valley – so I have to return to Shangri-La another day.

When we confer with the resort's adventure concierge, Mr Sonam Gelek, he suggests alternatives.

We like his choice of the Potatso National Park with its clear alpine lakes and bearded forest of grey-green lichen.

I love the autumnal sakura-like blooms and the last-frontier solitude at China's first national park.

Mr Gelek also suggests Xiao Zhongdian village, and images of our last-minute sojourn still return to me.

Our first glimpse of the village, set in a colossal valley, is from a high point.

We see a gleaming river that locals ride on yak-skin rafts on weekends. We see fields of red and yellow too.

Idyllic and remote, the valley calls to mind the fictional Shangri-La in the 1933 novel Lost Horizon. In the utopia imagined by British author James Hilton, Shangri-La is a mystical valley where near-immortals live.

Shangri-La is actually the new name for Zhongdian county. Many cities on the China-Tibet border have vied for the coveted name, and the Chinese government gave extraordinary Zhongdian that honour in 2001.

As I watch yaks cross the river before sunset, and immerse myself in other lost-in-time scenes, there is a whiff of Lost Horizon.

Shangri-La is another China, hidden and riveting.

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Follow Lee Siew Hua on Twitter @STsiewhua.

The writer's trip was hosted by The Hidden Valley Resort.

Win a glamping trip for two worth $10,000 at The Hidden Valley Resort in Shangri-La. Subscribers of The Straits Times can check out the contest on this page.

GETTING THERE

To get to Shangri-La city, fly on SilkAir (www.silkair.com) from Singapore to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in southwest China.

From Kunming, take a domestic flight on China Eastern Airlines (sg.ceair.com/en) to the Diqing Shangri-La Airport.

Alternatively, SilkAir also flies to the southwestern cities of Chongqing and Chengdu. Then book a domestic flight to Shangri-La.

The Hidden Valley Resort (www.thehiddenvalleyresort.com) arranges the 20-minute car ride from the airport to the resort.

Room rates for the five Tibetan tented villas are US$380 (S$514) a person a night. For the 10 rooms in the Tibetan Residence, rates start at US$280 a person per night.

These all-inclusive rates cover accommodation, farm-to-table meals, guided culture and adventure experiences and domestic transportation.

TRAVEL TIPS

- Be alert to spontaneous local experiences, such as weddings and harvests. The Tibetans are gracious, and we ask politely to join them. Sometimes, they invite travellers home for a cup of butter tea.
- There are new experiences in every season. Mushroom foraging is from May to September, for instance. Other months are filled with weddings, highland barley harvesting and black-necked crane watching – consult the resort.
- Travel is unpredictable in destinations with changeable conditions. Our day-trip plans to see rare snub-nosed monkeys and a winery were hobbled by a landslide. But just seek worthy alternatives – we step into an idyllic village in a valley and an alpine park. Keep an adventurous attitude.
- Glamping is a little colder and wilder than lounging in a hotel room, but the traveller will be wonderfully in tune with nature.
- Acclimatise to the high altitude. No need to move at a hectic Singaporean pace, especially during the first couple of days. Your doctor may prescribe medication to prevent altitude sickness.



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Glamping resort dreamt up by four friends

When four Singaporean childhood friends on a road trip to the far west of China were shown a hidden valley in Shangri-La by a local in 2012, they started dreaming of a perfect little retreat for themselves.

The allure was the Tibetan culture at this frontier and the ancient Tea Horse Road that passed through Shangri-La in Yunnan province.

The Chinese empire once traded tea for Tibetan horses that they prized for war, using a legendary trade route that wound 6,000km through some of the world's harshest and grandest terrain of snow passes and gorges.

The quartet began to think bigger. They decided to build Yunnan's first glamping resort, and open it to travellers. The Hidden Valley Resort would be Tibetan-inspired, yet be a modern and sumptuous sanctuary.

Among them, architect Calvin Sim, 56, co-founder of Singapore design firm Eco.id Architects, had oversight of the design and planning of the 15-key resort set in a meadow amid mountains.

Mr Sim, along with his friend Mr Philip Cheng, 56, the Hong Kong-based regional chief financial officer of an American Fortune 500 firm, described the resort's essence and their journey in building it, in an interview in Singapore.

The five tented villas have heated king-sized beds, fancy Japanese-style toilets and wood-burning stoves. Custom-built, the tents were tested for winter-worthiness on site.

The 150-year-old Tibetan residence, purchased from a village chief, was dismantled log by log and hauled to the 7ha site with yaks. It has lots of communal spaces including a patio, and none of the 10 rooms are alike.

Out of nothing, a kilometre of high-tension electric cabling had to be strung. Water purification, underground plumbing and Wi-Fi were set up.

In all, about about US$5 million (S$6.8 million) was spent on the resort.

Mr Sim, whose projects include W Maldives and Ritz Carlton Residences Singapore, created a gorgeous library and bar arrayed with bulbous glass and clay qingker or highland-barley wine jars.

The reception desk is an artsy assemblage of Chinese and Korean chests. Tibetan saddles are suspended on the wall.

The resort, which was soft-launched last May, officially opens on 22 Feb.

Mr Cheng, who loves mountaineering, is at home at the resort which sits under starry skies at an altitude of 3,300m.

"If you live in a city, you feel rested here. It's remote but not so remote – drive 20 minutes and you are in the Old Town. Our location gives you options," he says.

Their other two friends are also global nomads and urbanites who seek far-flung places.

Mr Ray Chong, who shuttles between Seattle and Singapore, now owns a restaurant business after a long corporate career.

Mr Peter Ho has a waste-to-energy business in Singapore, and the resort is a domain for his 30 years of expertise in adventure travel planning and resort management.

Mr Jeff Fuchs, a Himalayan explorer and Canadian author who wrote The Ancient Tea Horse Road, says of the Tibetan ethos of the resort: "It is a little bit of magic to find a place that reflects the concept of 'taking time'.

"Traditions are respected, local ways are genuinely incorporated and there a sense that – for a time at least – one can be immersed in a space that encourages a longer look at mountains and their people."

I split my recent week-long stay between the residence and a tent, which was luxurious but also a wilder and more vulnerable experience.

Only a slightly translucent tent separated me from the firmament and the icy, insistent wind and the barking of village dogs, though I thought they were wolves at first.

Glamping on the Tibetan Plateau was exciting, but I knew this was simply a romantic rendering of how the nomadic Tibetans and traders lived.

Certainly, I revelled in it. My tenting life came with intuitive service from the local staff, most of them drawn from the local community, for Tibetan authencity.

The resident chef and resort manager made every farm-to-table meal a feast.

Hot pot for cold nights, stewed pork ribs infused in herbal wine, lightly battered mushrooms that flourish in the area, novel yak pizza, delicate fish soup, warm beer bread for breakfast, fragrant onion cakes speckled with sesame and 13-spice mix (we had a fun lesson too) and more were relished.

On our last night, we had a barbecue and private bonfire under a full moon, with Tibetan song and dance by the staff, the young women looking radiant in silken garments.

The glamping life is indulgent, with intrepid moments.

Exclusively for The Straits Times subscribers





The Hidden Valley Resort is the first glamping (glamorous camping) boutique resort in Shangri-La, Yunnan. Located in a stunning Tibetan enclave in China's last frontier, the resort offers a truly unique travel experience. Besides glamping under the stars, you get to soak up Tibetan culture, hike, ride a horse, enjoy farm-to-table cuisine and venture to less-travelled places with a bespoke itinerary.

The incredible six-day-five-night package for two, valued at $10,000, includes airfare, accommodation, three meals a day, guided activities and transportation such as airport transfers.
Rejuvenate yourself, experience the essence of Tibetan life and create memories of a lifetime in Shangri-La, Yunnan. **For more details, go to thehiddenvalleyresort.com**

How to win the getaway:
1. Download the SPH Rewards app.
2. Look out for the giveaway in the Rewards section.
3. Save the deal to your e-wallet.
4. Press the "JOIN" button on the top right and answer this question in no more than 100 words:

"Why I want to go to The Hidden Valley Resort in Shangri-La".

The contest ends on Feb 8 and the winner will be informed by Feb 18. The travel period is between March and May 2019.
The winner is required to participate in a media interview prior to the trip and to share photos on his or her social media during his or her stay. Other terms and conditions apply.

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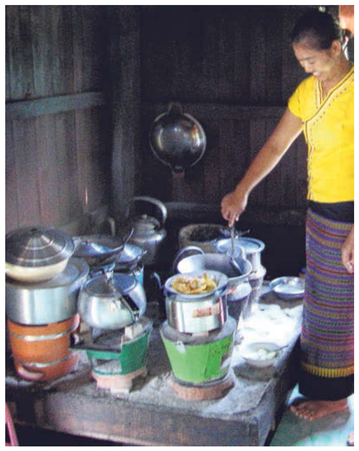
Five things you must see in Shangri-La http://str.sg/mustsee



The Ananda Temple complex in Bagan is a sight to behold at night.



The new Bagan Foodie Tour includes a 30-dish lunch of Myanmar specialities, based on the meals of the last king of Bagan, who would order 300 dishes.
PHOTOS: AMALA DESTINATIONS



Learn to whip up authentic Burmese meals at a cooking class, complete with traditional cooking techniques.







Above: The "green season" from June to September in Myanmar yields plenty of tasty fruits, which can be found in markets.

Left: Fried snacks are part of the varied street food offerings in Myanmar.
Above: The pickled tea leaf salad is popular with locals and tourists alike.

GETTING THERE

Fly from Singapore to Yangon on Singapore Airlines, Jetstar, Myanmar National Airlines, Myanmar Airways International or Air KBZ.

You can also continue your flight immediately to Mandalay on Singapore Airlines.

Singaporeans do not need a visa to enter Myanmar.

Travellers of other nationalities can check if they need to apply for an online visa, which can be secured in 24 hours, at evisa.moip.gov.mm

TIPS

- Be adventurous. Travel by ox cart, horse and carriage, longboat and bike. Also, do not be scared to go off the beaten track to places not normally on the tourist map.
- Take off your shoes before entering a temple or someone's home. However, do not let the soles of your feet face anyone – it is considered offensive.
- Try everything you are offered – you may develop a taste for tea leaf salad.
- Leave your designer handbag at home – even the crazy rich Burmese do not show off – and simply join the rest of the country in sitting on the floor to taste home-cooked food.
- The "green season" from June to September is one of the best periods for a foodie tour as there are plenty of tasty fruit and vegetables, plus the Myanmar mangoes are simply the best in the world and worth flying there for. (They are imported into Singapore, but difficult to find.)
- The best experiences in Myanmar are often not found online, so switch off your travel app and talk to your tour operator to ensure you have a tasty and authentic experience.

Myanmar's melting pot of flavours

The South-east Asian country is experiencing a gastronomic revolution, and is starting to show off its culinary expertise and indigenous ingredients

Caroline Phillips

It is said that the building up the road is inset with thousands of glittering diamonds and rubies.

Meanwhile, I am in a light and airy, bamboo-and-glass pavilion overlooking a lake dotted with purple lotus flowers.

Inside, there are decorative reclaimed mangrove roots, lamps that represent the moon and stars and a painted golden circle inspired by aikido philosophy: a reminder to be dedicated and humble.

I am served, among other dishes, seared foie gras with caramelised apples, star anise and spiced balsamico; truffle ravioli sprinkled with slivers of black truffle from Italy; house-marinated Norwegian salmon with glistening baubles of Sevruga caviar; and glazed scallops nestling on a green mango salad with pomelo and peanut crackers. Finally, a trio of chocolate pudding, fresh mango and dulce de leche ice cream.

It is contemporary, international fine dining that offers myriad tastes, textures, colours and temperatures alongside an excellent wine list.

I could be in New York, London or Singapore. But I am in Yangon (formerly Rangoon), in Myanmar, which was previously Burma.

Seeds (*www.seedsyangon.com*) is a new-fashioned style of restaurant – it opened in February 2017 – that cocks a snook at Yangon's colonial past. It is the creation of chef Felix Eppisser – who bagged a Michelin star for his Zurich restaurant in his native Switzerland – and his co-owner and wife, Lucia.

When I leave the restaurant, I pass the Shwedagon Pagoda, the aforementioned building that is set with thousands of gems and also embellished with enough gold leaf to decorate Paradise. I couldn't be anywhere but Yangon.

There is a gastronomic revolution underway in Myanmar.

Until recently, the country lagged behind its Asian neighbours – the foodie big shots of India, Thailand and China – and its cuisine was one of Asia's least known.

But now Myanmar is catching up.

It has just begun showing off its international and local culinary expertise and indigenous ingredients.

In September last year, MasterChef Myanmar was launched to a nation that is increasingly curious about food; and visitors are being invited by Amala Destinations (*amaladestinations.com*), a Singapore tour operator, into private homes and kitchens for home-cooked meals and cooking lessons.

The country has been opening up since 2015. In parallel, there has been a growth in culinary variety and quality, especially in Yangon.

Mr Edwin Briels, a business owner and expatriate Yangon resident of 15 years, says: "In the past, it was difficult to find anything but Bamar food (from Myanmar's main ethnic group), and a few Indian and Chinese restaurants.

Now, there's a range of high-end Western restaurants alongside a mushrooming of venues offering Myanmar's (very different) regional cuisines – everything from Kachin and Shan to Mon and Chin food."

Ye Htut Win, judge on MasterChef Myanmar and founder of Sharky's restaurants, adds: "Interest in good food is growing among Myanmar people, who are now better travelled at home and overseas, as well as through the spread of social media in the last few years."

Meanwhile, a sign of how much the locals already enjoy food is the standard Burmese greeting to locals and foreigners alike: "Sa pyi bi la?", which translates as, "Have you had your lunch yet?"

So, to the foodie highlights of my three-week holiday.

The newly launched Bagan Foodie Tour (book through *www.amala-destinations.com*) in Bagan, central Myanmar, is a big hit. It includes an evening tasting of traditional temple foods at the 11th-century Min O Chan Thar pagoda, accompanied by the light of candles in storm lamps and the tinkling of pagoda bells in the air.

I sit on a wicker mat to sample snacks such as "mummies and daddies" (quail's egg in a chickpea flour batter) and pennywort akyaw (like tempura) served on a traditional lacquer tray – food, unsurprisingly, more authentic than that to be found in Singapore's Peninsula Plaza, also known as "Little Burma" – with the background "music" of stridulating crickets and the chanting of monks.

The tour also encompasses a guided walk and a Grasshopper Adventures bike ride (*www.grasshopperadventures.com*).

We go to a market boasting piles of dragonfruit and Chinese apples and to a food festival where watermelons are being carved with elaborate Burmese temples and flowers.

Then we visit a cottage industry producing fermented soya bean paste, where bare-chested men clad in longyi (a sarong-style garment) stir cauldrons with bamboo paddles. Women sit on bamboo floor mats gauging the weight of soya paste lumps – using their palms as "weighing scales" – before packing them.

There is also a 30-dish lunch of local specialities in the itinerary – based on the meals of the last king of Bagan, who would order 300 dishes. It is served under a tamarind tree overlooking ancient pagodas.

As with any Burmese meal, t'amin (rice) is central to this feast, plus side dishes and curries – the mildest in Asia – that blend Burmese, Indian, Chinese and Mon influences. And there are plates such as snake gourd curry, taro stem and ginger, tamarind and pickled tea leaf salad – the flavours predominantly savoury, salty and tart.

For pudding, there is a lump of jaggery (palm sugar), washed down with green tea.

Next, to another winner: my cooking class at the Tin Tin Cookery School (book through *www.amala-destinations.com*), which opened in 2016. This time, I am in a traditional stilt teak house on Inle Lake, eastern Myanmar.

A table is set with baskets of fresh vegetables, sauces and spices. The walls are decorated with a photo of the late Myanmar leader General Aung San, wicker baskets, pillows and conical bamboo hats.

A "boat shop" – a longboat – stops outside the door to deliver our freshly picked groceries: paniers of aubergines and green peppers.

Ms Tin Tin, a genial woman sporting a Shan top and longyi, teaches Shan cuisine, which is similar to that of northern Thailand.

I hone my Burmese culinary skills under her expert guidance as well as that of her niece, the latter with thanaka (wood-based) make-up daubed on her face. Mr Naung Naung, my guide, translates.

First, we chop and prepare our ingredients, including green tomatoes. "They're from the floating gardens," says Naung Naung, "so they're juicy."

Next, I learn to create dishes such as Shan pumpkin soup, spring onion tempura and steamed Mekong River catfish in banana leaf. Then Ms Tin Tin demonstrates how to cook it over charcoal in vessels made from clay mixed with river sand (from the local pottery village of Naung Bo).

Afterwards, Mr Naung Naung and I eat what we have prepared, sitting at a traditional low table. "It's usual," he says, "for the hostess not to join her guests eating in a private home."

Finally, to Yangon again and to Sharky's (*www.sharkys.com.mm*). It is time to meet the gastro eminence of Myanmar, the aforementioned Ye Htut Win, founder and self-dubbed "chief artisan" of Sharky's – with three pioneering, organic restaurant-cum-delis in Yangon, Bagan and Ngapali.

He has single-handedly created the beginnings of a food culture in Myanmar that mixes local resources and Western traditions.

He has experimented with varieties of grains, tomatoes and spinach that can take the steamy heat, and located a remote place along the Indian Ocean where he harvests salt flakes from the sea.

He has introduced micro greens, rocket and gluten-free bread of golden teff, rice wheat and buckwheat to the country.

He has also improvised – using local buffalo milk – to make Italian-, French- and Swiss-style cheeses: He was the first to make cheese in Myanmar, influencing an entire generation.

It does not stop here. Ye Htut Win also makes his own charcuterie and artisan gelato, rears his own corn-fed chickens and dry-ages striploin (from 45 up to 150 days).

"To concentrate the flavour and have less fat," he says, as we taste every dish.

The bread is so good that I wish I could buy it wherever I am; the chicken flavoursome; and the mango ice cream better than any found in Italy.

While filming MasterChef, Ye Htut Win discovered the huge diversity of Myanmar's ingredients.

He was struck by the "multi-dimensional tastes and unique flavours" he found in regional foraged foods, wild herbs and veggie-focused menus.

He believes "farm to table" – with premium local ingredients, ethnic cooking and foraged wild herbs – will be the country's next big thing.

On my final day, I sit over a steaming cup of green tea suffused with the flavour of roasted sesame seeds. I am in the Yangon Excelsior (*www.yangon-excelsior.com*), the country's latest, hottest hotel opening: a stylishly contemporised reincarnation of the erstwhile colonial headquarters of Steel Brothers exporters.

"Myanmar food is great, isn't it?" asks Mr Briels from across the table.

I confess to him my love affair with the country's fermented tea leaf and dried shrimp salad. I talk about the delicious meals I have had on this trip in private homes, including the lunch cooked by a Palaung tribeswoman in her traditional home amid the stupa-topped hills near Hsipaw; another enjoyed in a house in an isolated Shan village near opium fields.

I wax eloquent about our guided visits to vibrant, traditional markets, especially the Nyandaw market – with its several unidentifiable species of mushrooms and three types of mustard leaf and where we breakfast on rice noodles and ground peanut soup for 63 Singapore cents a bowl.

All this in the colonial town of Pyin Oo Lwin with its half-timbered, turn-of-the-last-century mansions.

Ye Htut Win sees an upcoming generation of top chefs emerging in the country from MasterChef Myanmar.

"Not only for European-style cooking," he says, "but for Myanmar cuisines from fine dining to street food, where less oil is used, flavours are more balanced and primary ingredients play a starring role."

He himself cooks with passion. "Interestingly, there's no word for that in Burmese."

There could well be one soon when it comes to food.

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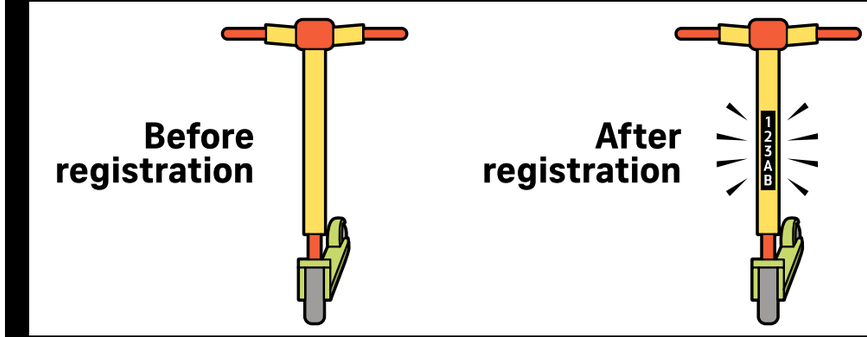
- Caroline Phillips is an award-winning journalist who reckons the King of Bagan got it right by having 300 dishes at a meal.

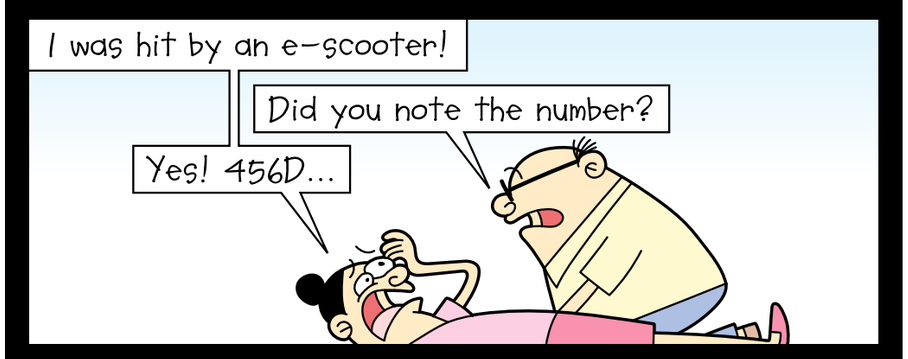
- The writer's trip was sponsored by Amala Destinations, a travel service that specialises in private personalised journeys.

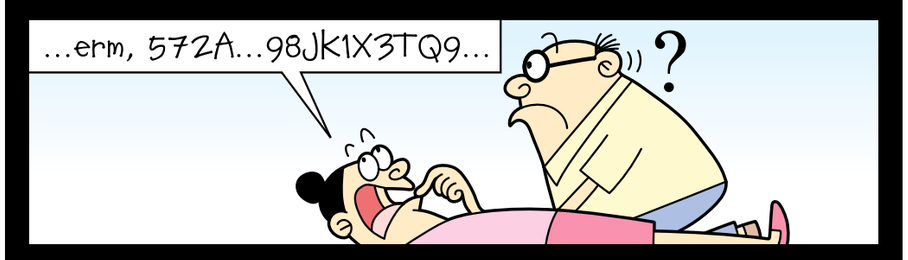


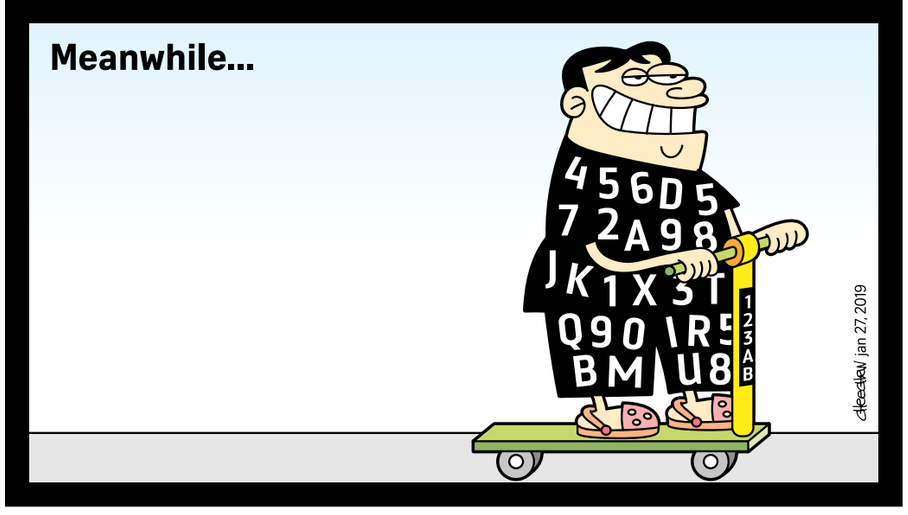
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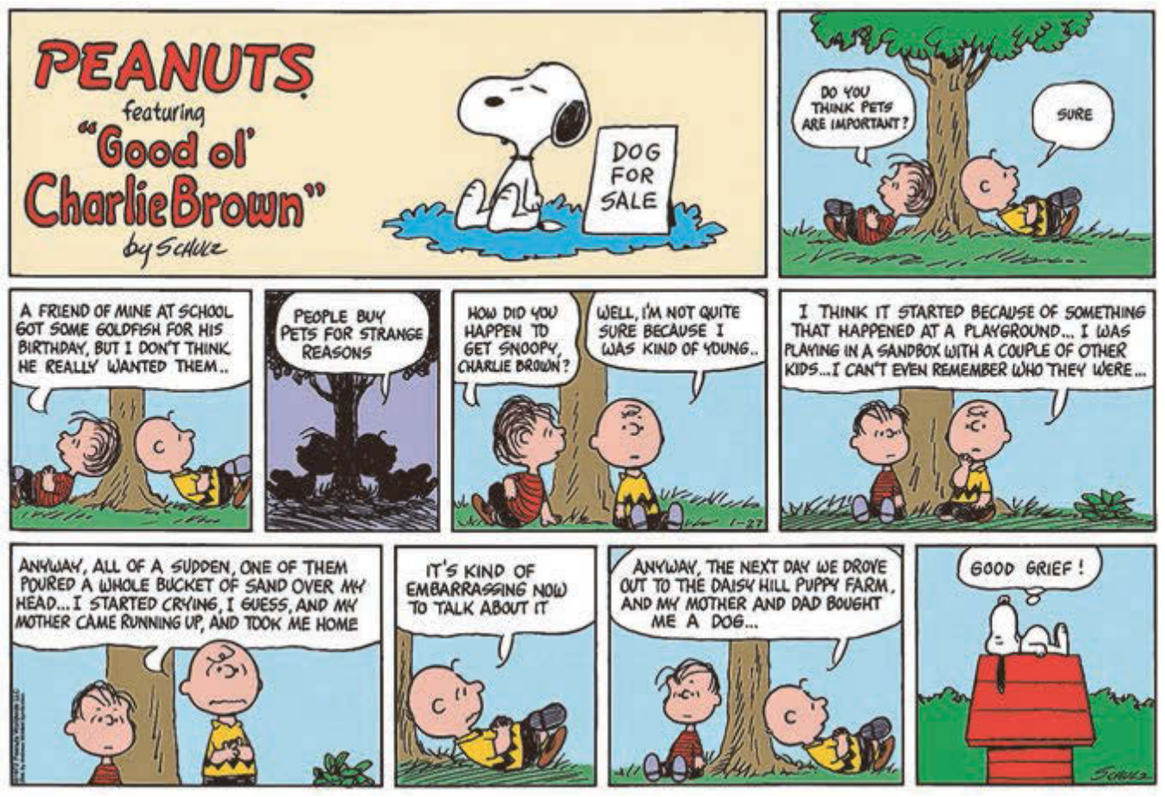


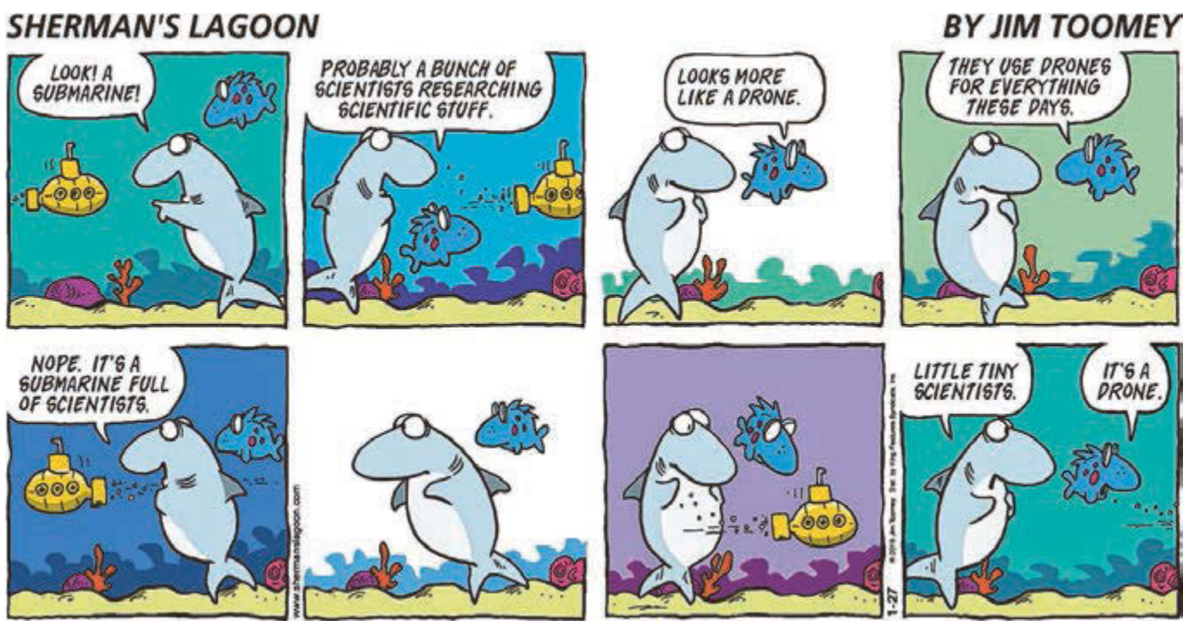


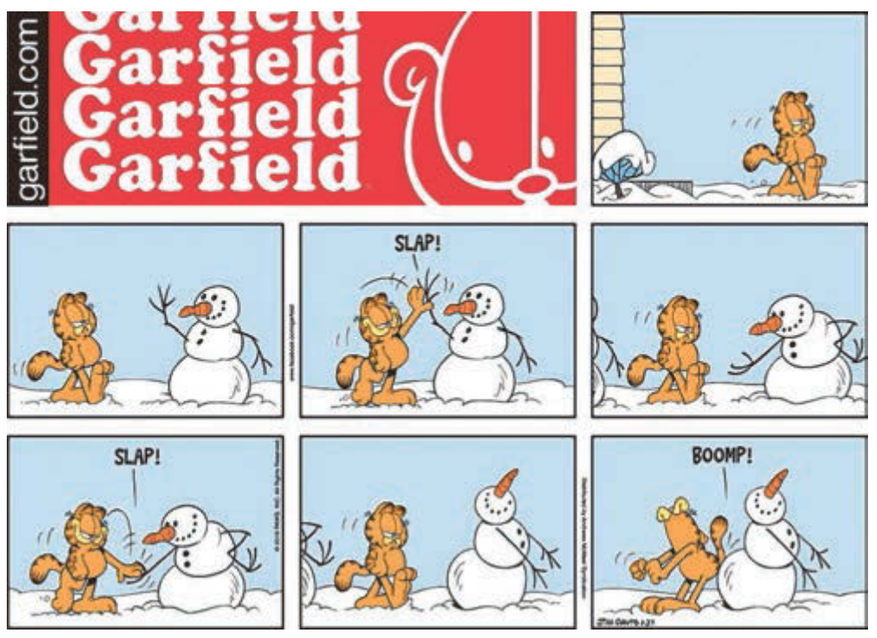


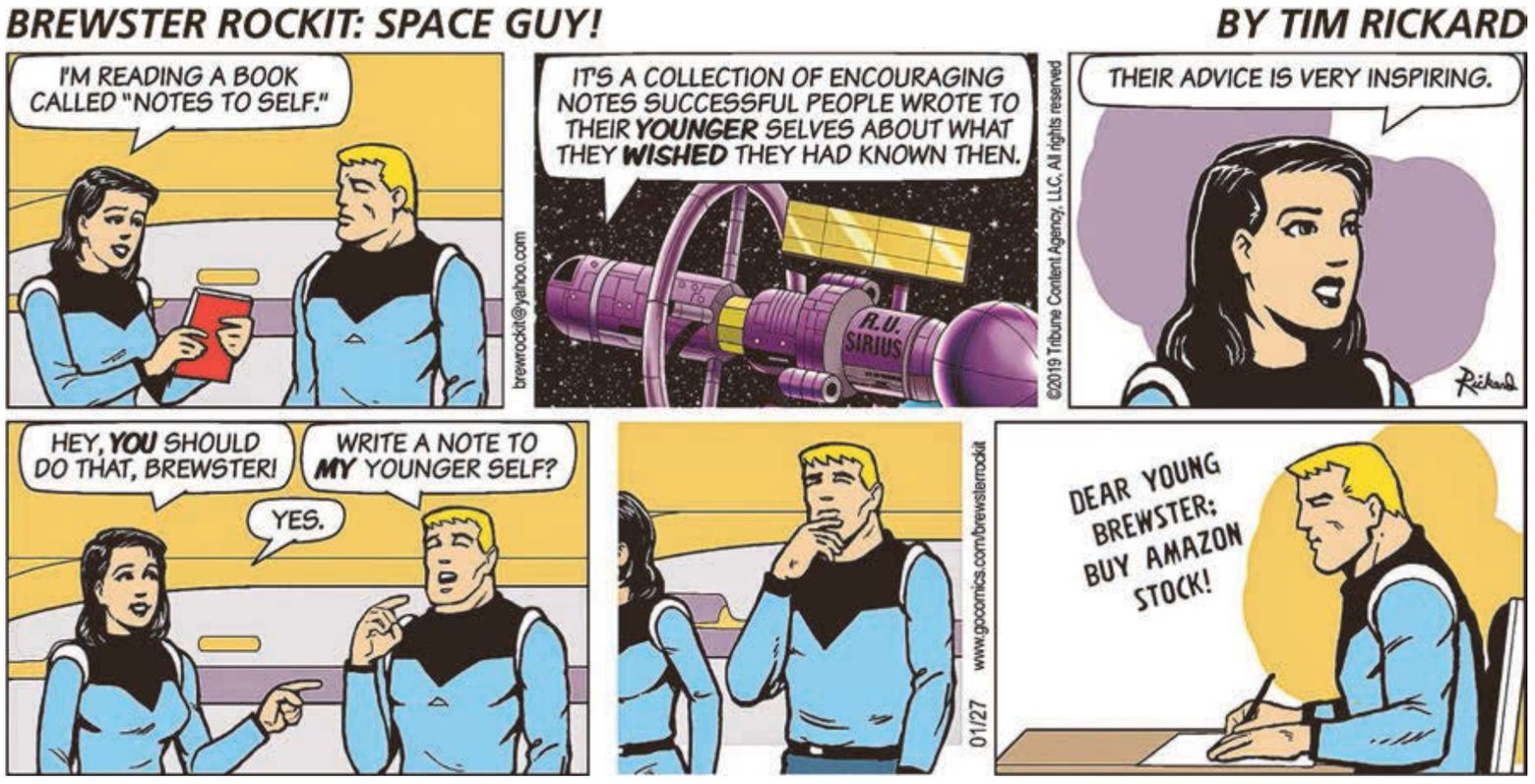












Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

		1		3	6			
			7				3	
		6	5			1	2	
		3		2	7			4
				9				
8			6	1		2		
	3	7			8	6		
	8				3			
			1	6		3		

1/27 DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Previous Puzzle Answer 1/20

9	7	5	2	8	6	3	1	4
3	6	4	7	9	1	5	2	8
8	1	2	4	3	5	6	9	7
4	5	9	8	1	3	2	7	6
6	3	8	5	2	7	9	4	1
7	2	1	6	4	9	8	5	3
5	8	7	1	6	2	4	3	9
2	4	3	9	7	8	1	6	5
1	9	6	3	5	4	7	8	2

Free to Air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Talking Point 2018 (HD) (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Secret Meat Business (Info-Ed)
10.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
11.00 LGT Young Soloists String Ensemble (Culture)
PM
12.20 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (HD) (Info-Ed)
1.00 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
3.00 World's Best Beaches (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawkers (Variety)
5.00 The $100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Our Makan Places: Lost And Found 6 (HD) (Info-Ed)
6.30 The Simpsons 29 (HD) (PG) (Sitcom)
7.00 Cine On 5: How To Train Your Dragon 2 (PG) (CC) (Movie)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Elephant: King Of The Kalahari (Info-Ed)
10.30 Lip Sync Battle 4 (PG) (Variety)
11.00 Fear Factor MTV USA (PG) (Variety)
AM
12.00 The Dr Oz Show 9 (HD) (PG13) (Info-Ed)
12.50 Plastic Surgery Is My Business (PG) (Info-Ed)
1.20 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
2.20 LGT Young Soloists String Ensemble (Culture)
3.40 Lip Sync Battle 4 (PG) (Variety)
4.10 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Food Source 3 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home 2 (Drama)
9.00 Happy Friends (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Children)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Children)
11.00 Tuesday Report – Ninety Years Young (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 The Quarters (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (HD) (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
9.00 Foodie Sunday (CC) (Variety)
10.00 News Tonight (HD) (News)
10.30 Discover 30 Degrees North Latitude (PG) (CC) (Variety)
11.30 Frontline (Current Affairs)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Deer And The Cauldron (HD) (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U

AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Perfect Match 3 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Big Big World 2 (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Secrets (CC) (Info-Ed)
1.30 Hey DJ (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Lady With Class (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 14th KKBox Music Awards (CC) (Variety)
10.30 Spicy Hot (CC) (Variety)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Undercover Asia 3 (PG) (Current Affairs) (Debut)
12.30 Listening To The Mountain Sages (Info-Ed)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 Asia Business First Weekend
8.00 News Now
8.30 Edible Wild
9.00 News Now
9.30 A Beautiful World
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 Super Octogenarians
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary
PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.00 News Now
3.30 Asia Business First Weekend
4.02 Conversation With
4.30 Super Octogenarians
5.00 News Now
5.30 Asia Business First Weekend
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 Vice & Virtue: 1800s Singapore (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 Asia Business First Weekend
9.02 Neighbours: Singapore-Malaysia
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 On The Red Dot – Old Enough! (CC)
11.02 A Big Little Murder
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 This Weekend
1.02 Asia Business First Weekend
1.30 On The Red Dot – Old Enough!
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 Super Octogenarians
4.00 News Now
4.30 Once A Refugee
5.02 Neighbours: Singapore-Malaysia
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
1.00 Indian Panorama: 100 Days Of Love (PG) (Malayalam)
4.00 Vasantham Box Office: Anbe Odi Vaa (PG) (CC)
7.00 OK Kanmani (Schoolkids)
7.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 10 (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Cinema Express: Sketch (PG13)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (R) (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
7.00 Tip The Mouse (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 Robot Trains (HD) (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight!! Vanguard (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago – Sons Of Garmadon (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.30 Extreme Football (HD) (Schoolkids)
PM
12.00 Basic Mini-tary Training (Schoolkids)
12.30 Museum Mysteries (Schoolkids)
1.00 Loud House (Schoolkids)
1.30 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
2.00 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
2.30 The Deep (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (Preschool)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Loud House (Schoolkids)
5.00 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
5.30 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
6.00 Totally Totto (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Fableicious (HD) (PG) (Schoolkids)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Ninja Warrior (PG) (CC) (Variety)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Max Muay Thai: Ultimate Muay Thai (HD) (PG13) (Sports)
PM
12.00 Close

SURIA

AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Solo (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Balik Sekolah (HD) (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (HD) (Drama)
1.30 #Urbanista (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (Drama)
3.00 Juara Memasak Milenia (CC) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (HD) (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.00 Tahu Nahu (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Cakap-Cakap (Variety)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Romantika 8 (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed) (Finale)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Wahhhnita (Info–Ed)
9.30 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 The Streets 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.00 Juang Seorang Usahawan (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (HD) (R) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singteltv.com.sg

Horoscopes

March 21 - April 19
Your emotional side is out in force. That could mean you may be feeling a bit shaky or a bit cocky. Whatever it is, you may be a step or two out of sync with your peers.

April 20 - May 20
Your feelings are more potent than usual and you may feel an urge to either tell someone you love him or show him the back of your hand. It is a good time to live life to the fullest.

May 21 - June 20
Your health is important, obviously, but on a day like today, you are more empowered than usual to take positive steps to address it directly. Eat better or do whatever you know you need to do.

June 21 - July 22
The intense emotional swirl catches you in its rush and you may find yourself amid a glorious upheaval. It no doubt leaves you exhausted, but you should still be able to have a good time.

July 23 - Aug 22
Someone close has a secret agenda – one that might not please you all that much. You may want to just decide that ignorance is bliss as it is going to be difficult to figure out what is really going on.

Aug 23 - Sept 22
Try not to worry too much about your people as long as you can keep chatting with them in one way or another. Constant communication should be the answer to almost all problems.

Sept 23 - Oct 22
Changes are coming, like it or not. You may be better equipped to deal with them than most, but that does not mean it is fun. Try to help your people if they look like they need it. They will remember your assistance.

Oct 23 - Nov 21
Your energy is more social than usual today and you may find yourself drawing new people into your orbit. It is a good time to make connections that could be valuable for work or romance.

Nov 22 - Dec 21
Your dreams are making life much more interesting. In fact, you may want to write them down. One odd detail may jump out at you later and lead you in a wild new direction.

Dec 22 - Jan 19
Your workplace – or maybe your family – is going through a power play and that could involve you. Try your best to do right by yourself without dragging anyone else down.

Jan 20 - Feb 18
Your emotional side is somewhat troubled and that could make life harder in other aspects. Just give yourself all the time you need to think things through and all will be well.

Feb 19 - March 20
You are having a hard time figuring out what that one important person really wants from you. But you just need to deal with ambiguity for a few days. Try not to commit yourself to anything just yet.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 19
7.05 Storage Wars 12
7.35 The Pickers 11
8.30 Counting Cars 5
9.00 Counting Cars 6
9.30 History Drama: Vikings 5
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
11.20 Ancient Aliens 10
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
1.10 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
2.05 Milwaukee Blacksmith
2.35 History Drama: Vikings 5
3.30 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
4.25 Ancient Aliens 10
5.20 History Drama: Project Blue Book
6.15 The Pickers 12
7.10 10 Things You Don't Know About Malaysians
8.05 Forged In Fire 5
9.00 Mountain Men 7
9.55 The Last Pope?
11.45 The Pickers 12

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Bring It! 2
7.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
PM
12.00 Married At First Sight Australia 4
3.00 The Watcher In The Woods
4.35 Seatbelt Psychic
5.00 Born This Way 2
6.00 Tiny House Nation
7.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
8.00 Up! Pretty
10.00 Deadly Secrets By The Lake
11.35 Hoarders 8

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.45 Meet The Parents
8.30 Footloose (2011) (NC16)
10.20 My Little Pony: The Movie (2017)
PM
12.00 American Assassin (NC16)
1.45 Inconceivable (2017) (NC16)
3.30 Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens
5.45 The Lego Ninjago Movie
7.25 Braven (NC16)
9.00 Justice League
11.00 211 (NC16)
AM
12.25 Final Destination 2 (NC16)
1.55 Win A Date With Tad Hamilton!
3.30 Dances With Wolves (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
6.05 Saturday Night Fever
8.00 Tequila Sunrise
9.55 Dragonheart: Battle For The Heartfire
11.35 Hollywood Homicide
PM
1.30 A Time To Kill
4.00 The Game Plan
5.50 Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge Of The Sith
8.10 Red
10.00 The Last Boyscout (NC16)
11.40 Inside Man
AM
1.50 The Untouchables
3.50 You Don't Know Jack (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
6.29 Wok Of Love (HD)
7.45 Happy Camp 2 (HD)
9.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
10.30 Momo's Paradise 4 (HD)
11.00 Pleasant Goat And Big Big Wolf – Marching To The Wonderland (HD)
11.30 Young Travellers' Survival Handbook (HD)
PM
12.00 Follow Me 8 (HD)
12.30 Perfect Match 6 (HD)
2.00 One Belt, One Road (HD)
3.00 Familiar Taste (HD)
4.30 Taste Taiwan 3 (HD)
5.00 Liao Zhai 4 (HD)
7.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
8.00 I Am The Actor (HD)
10.00 Sweet Dreams (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
6.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
7.00 Table Tennis: Seamaster 2019 ITTF World Tour Hungarian Open: Men's Quarter-finals, Women's & Men's Doubles Final
10.00 FEI Equestrian World 2018
10.30 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Billabong Pipe Masters Highlights
11.30 National Basketball League 2018/19: Round 15 Sydney Kings Vs Perth Wildcats
PM
1.30 Cycling: Tour Of Hainan 2018 Highlights
2.30 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Chile Highlights
3.00 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Colombia Highlights
3.30 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
4.30 Volleyball Nations League 2018 Women Final Rounds – Final (USA Vs Turkey)
7.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
8.00 ISU European Figure Skating Championships 2019: Exhibition
10.30 FEI Equestrian World 2018
11.00 Multi Sport: FISE World Series Highlights 2018: Edmonton
AM
12.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 1
4.30 Cycling: inCycle 2018
5.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
9.36 The Football Review
10.00 National Basketball League 2018/19 - NBL Slam
10.24 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Semi-finals Matches 37 – 41 (Live)
PM
12.20 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.55 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Matches 42 and 43 (Live)
1.46 Fiba World Basketball 2019
2.08 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Matches 44 and 45 (Live)
3.33 The Football Review
4.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Singapore Slingers Vs Saigon Heat (Live)
6.00 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
7.00 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Highlights Semi-finals Leg 2
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 San Miguel Alab Pilipinas Vs Hong Kong Eastern (Live)
10.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Match 44
10.30 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Match 45
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
AM
12.00 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
1.00 Magazine: Trans World Sport 2019
2.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
2.30 Football: EFL League 2 2018/19 Bury Vs Lincoin City
4.30 Fiba World Basketball 2019
5.00 National Basketball League Round 15 Brisbane Bullets Vs Sydney Kings

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 204)

AM
6.30 Golf: European Tour 2019: Omega Dubai Desert Classic Day 3
11.00 Golf: Morning Drive 2018
PM
1.00 Golf: Best Lessons Ever 2018
1.30 Golf Advisor Round Trip 2018
2.00 Golf: World Long Drive: Clash In The Canyon
4.00 Golf: Playing Lessons 2018
4.30 Golf: European Tour 2019: Omega Dubai Desert Classic Day 4
9.00 Golf: Feherty 2018 (Tommy Fleetwood)
10.00 Golf: European Tour 2019: Omega Dubai Desert Classic Day 4
AM
2.30 Golf: The Skill Code 2017
3.30 Golf: World Long Drive: Tennessee Big Shots
5.30 Golf: Feherty 2018 (Kevin Nealon)

Singtel TV

DISCOVERY (HD) (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.35 Gold Rush 9
7.25 How To Build... Everything
7.50 The Mind Control Freaks
8.15 Strip The Cosmos 3
9.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
9.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
10.45 How Do They Do It? 15
11.35 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
PM
12.25 Shifting Gears With Aaron Kaufman
4.35 Unusual Suspects: Deadly Intent 9
5.25 Gold Rush 9
6.15 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
7.10 Marooned With Ed Stafford 2
8.05 How China Made It
9.00 Shark Week: Shark-Croc Showdown
9.55 Man, Woman, Wild
10.50 Kings Of The Wild
11.45 Unusual Suspects: Deadly Intent 9
AM
12.35 How Do They Do It? 15
1.25 Impossible Engineering 4
2.15 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
3.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
3.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
4.45 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
5.35 Shifting Gears With Aaron Kaufman

TLC (HD) (CHANNEL 254)

AM
6.35 Zumbo's Just Desserts
7.25 Say Yes To The Vegas Dress
9.05 Outdaughtered 3
9.55 Buddy's Big Bakedown
10.45 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
11.35 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern 10
PM
12.25 Dr Pimple Popper
1.15 Cruise The World
1.40 New Taste Of Hong Kong
2.05 The Little Couple 9
2.55 Star Plates
3.45 Jamie & Jimmy's Food Fight Club 5
4.35 What If We Get Married?
5.25 Cruise The World
5.50 New Taste Of Hong Kong
6.15 Rachel Hunter's Tour Of Beauty
7.10 Outdaughtered 3
8.05 Dr Pimple Popper
9.00 Star Plates
9.55 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
10.50 Buddy's Big Bakedown
11.45 Fast Food Mania
AM
12.35 Ultimate Cake Off 2
1.25 Project Runway 16
2.15 Great British Bake-Off 4
3.05 Window Warriors
3.55 Curvy Brides Boutique 2
4.45 Kitchen Boss
5.35 Playhouse Masters

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 MacGyver 3
6.50 Team Ninja Warrior 2
8.30 Hawaii Five-0 9
9.20 Instinct
10.10 Seal Team 2
11.00 Supernatural 14
11.45 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
PM
12.45 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders
2.30 The Amazing Race 29
4.20 Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines
6.25 The Blacklist 6
7.15 Hawaii Five-0 9
8.10 MacGyver 3
9.05 Seal Team 2
10.00 The International (2009)
AM
1.20 Hawaii Five-0 9
2.10 American Ninja Warrior 8

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 iZombie 4
6.45 Clipaholics
10.05 Top 20 Funniest
11.50 The Conjuring 2
PM
2.15 Final Destination 5
3.55 Friends 9
4.30 The Big Bang Theory 12
4.55 Young Sheldon 2
5.20 Pan
7.20 Getaway
9.00 The Intern
11.15 Lethal Weapon 3
AM
12.20 Breaking The Magician's Code
1.10 Clipaholics
2.00 Major Crimes
3.00 Supergirl 2
4.00 Top 20 Funniest
5.00 Major Crimes

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 Takeshi's Castle 4
7.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
8.05 Mr Bean
9.05 Most Ridiculous
9.30 Your Face Or Mine 4
10.20 Most Ridiculous 2
11.10 Saturday Night Live 44
PM
12.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
12.40 Lip Sync Battle 4
1.55 Back To School Special
2.40 Teachers 2
4.20 Back To School Special
5.10 Just For Laughs Gags 14
5.35 Saturday Night Live 44
6.40 Most Ridiculous 2
7.40 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle 3
8.55 Idiotsitter
9.45 The Jim Jefferies Show
10.40 Funny As Hell 4
11.40 Inside Amy Schumer
AM
1.15 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle III
2.30 Funny As Hell 4

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 The Legend Of Golden Music
8.00 Hua Hee Seko-Lah 5
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 All Out Of Love
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 The Golden Melodies 2018
2.30 All Out Of Love
4.30 The Legend Of Golden Music
5.30 Hua Hee Seko-Lah 5
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 All Out Of Love
9.00 Super Nightclub
10.30 Top Singers
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 All Out Of Love

VIDEO ON DEMAND

1 Venom (2018) (HD) (Latest)
2 Elixir Of Love (Mandarin)
3 Kasut Ku Kusut (Cine Ekspres)
4 Karthikeyanum Kaanamal Pona Kadhaliyum (Asian-Kollywood)
5 Kaala Hindi (Asian-Bollywood)

Programmes available anytime on demand

MIO STADIUM (HD) (CHANNEL 102)

AM
6.00 PL 18/19 Premier League World – Sir Alex Ferguson Special
7.00 Review Of The Season 17/18
9.00 PL 18/19 Netbusters
9.30 PL 18/19 Premier League World
10.00 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
10.30 PL 18/19 Match Of The Week
PM
12.30 PL 18/19 Netbusters
1.00 PL 18/19 Premier League World
1.30 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
2.00 Review Of The Season 16/17
4.00 PL 18/19 Match Of The Week
6.00 PL 18/19 Netbusters
6.30 PL 18/19 Premier League World
7.00 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
7.30 PL 18/19 Premier League World – Sir Alex Ferguson Special
8.30 PL 18/19 Match Of The Week
10.30 Goals Of The Season 17/18
11.30 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
AM
12.00 Classic Match Manchester United Vs Liverpool 93/94
2.00 Classic Match Arsenal Vs West Ham 12/13

MIO SPORTS (CHANNEL 111)

AM
6.00 Dutch Eredivisie 18/19 PEC Zwolle Vs Feyenoord
8.00 FA Cup 18/19 Bristol Vs Bolton
10.00 FA Cup 18/19 Newcastle Vs Watford
PM
12.00 Dutch Eredivisie 18/19 PSV Eindhoven Vs FC Groningen
2.00 Carabao Cup 18/19 Burton Vs Manchester City
4.00 Carabao Cup 18/19 Chelsea Vs Tottenham Hotspur
6.00 Dutch Eredivisie 18/19 Highlights
7.00 FA Cup 18/19 Manchester City Vs Burnley
9.00 FA Cup 18/19 Round Draw Round 4
9.20 Dutch Eredivisie 18/19 Feyenoord Vs AFC Ajax (Live)
11.25 FA Cup 18/19 Preview
11.55 FA Cup 18/19 Crystal Palace Vs Tottenham Hotspur (Live)
AM
1.55 FA Cup 18/19 Chelsea Vs Sheffield Wednesday (Live)

Snacks worth the calories



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

If you have not stocked up on Chinese New Year goodies, tarry no more.

The shopping mall festive bazaars will run for just a week more. Bakeries and snack shops are running low on stock for popular picks with many having already closed pre-orders.

The Sunday Times rounds up a smorgasbord of treats that are still available (the last we checked). From trending flavours of mala and truffle to Instagram-worthy desserts that make the perfect centrepiece, we bring you the best of the best, and present our food critics' top picks.

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• Follow Eunice Quek on Twitter @STEuniceQ

Tea-infused goodies

Food Critics' Pick

BAKERZIN



Whether it is in cookies or kueh lapis, different types of tea are being infused into Chinese New Year treats.

Earl Grey tea, in particular, is a popular choice.

The Lapis Place offers an Earl Grey kueh lapis (from $24, VivoCity's Chinese New Year fair).

Sprmrkt's Lemongrass Earl Grey Pineapple Tarts (right, from $38.80+ at STPI and Cluny Court outlets) make a return after a successful debut last year.

Local tea brand Teaspoon of Love (*www.tspoflove.com*), which specialises in tea-related products, has an Earl Grey Pineapple Tart, along with a new Osmanthus Longjing Pineapple Tart (right, from $28 each) – a spin on the classic Austrian Linzer cookie with a pineapple-osmanthus jam centre. Longjing green tea is a pan-roasted green tea produced in Hangzhou, China.

For a more familiar tea flavour, try Bakerzin's new matcha cookies, part of its cookie collection (above, from $8.80 a bottle) which includes coffee, black sesame and coconut chia seed flavours.





Chinese New Year fair locations

- Jurong Point, Level 1 atrium
- Marina Square, Level 1 atrium
- Nex, Level 1 main atrium
- Northpoint City, Level 1 atrium
- Raffles Xchange, Basement 1 atrium
- Suntec City, Level 1 east atrium
- Takashimaya Square, Basement 2
- Tampines Mall, Level 1 main atrium
- VivoCity, Level 1 main atrium

All fairs run till Feb 3.

Pineapple tarts with a twist



The quintessential pineapple tart – open-faced or closed – is pretty much sold everywhere.

Everyone has his favourite. The most popular brands include the bite-sized ones from Yang Yang (yangyang.com.sg); golf ball-sized tarts from Le Cafe Confectionery & Pastry (www.lecafe.com.sg); as well as those from Kele (available at various Chinese New Year fairs, www.kele.sg).

The hotels also churn out premium versions, such as Goodwood Park Hotel's over-sized 6.5-inch Huat! Tart ($48, call 6730-1786 or e-mail deli@goodwoodparkhotel.com).

Kele's sweet potato pineapple tarts – with a purple buttery crust – were already sold out islandwide since last weekend. Limited stock of its other flavours (from $27.80), such as rose and traditional pineapple tarts, along with the closed pineapple balls, are still available.

For pig-shaped ones, opt for Paradise Group's piggy tarts (right, $29.80 for 18 pieces, at various Paradise Group outlets).

If you prefer something more tangy, order the lime pineapple tarts ($21.80) from Provisions (available at Takashimaya Chinese New Year fair, or at *provisionsfood.oddle.me*), which have just the right amount of sour to balance the sweet.



Limited stock available, along with its other snacks such as Masala Lavosh Crackers ($13.80) and Curry Cashews ($8 or $18).

For a refreshing spin on the traditional pineapple tart, try Tiong Bahru Bakery's Lucky Pineapple Tart (above, $8.80).

The tart crust is filled with pineapples poached with passionfruit puree, ginger confit, coconut lime and almond cream. It is topped with more pineapple chunks, a sphere of pineapple-mango confit, red currants and the obligatory gold leaf.

The best part? It doubles as dessert too.

Food Critics' Pick

TIONG BAHRU BAKERY'S LUCKY PINEAPPLE TART

Local flavours

Food Critics' Pick

PAPAPENG



From nasi lemak to chicken rice and hae bee hiam (spicy dried shrimp sambal), snacks that boast local flavours are always the most addictive crowd-pleasers.

The nasi lemak cookies ($20.90, available at Takashimaya Chinese New Year fair or in stores) from HarriAnns is a crunchy cookie made with sambal, coconut milk, and ikan bilis, while the Chicken Bak Hu Kue Lapis (from $34 at Takashimaya Chinese New Year fair or at *ollella.oddle.me*) has layers of chicken floss between the sweet and soft sponge lapis layers – a combination of sweet and savoury.

Peanut snack company The Nutkins (*thenutkins.com*) has launched two new flavours – Black Pepper Crab and Baked Prawn (below, $5 each).

The company is by The Kettle Gourmet (*www.thekettlegourmet.com*) – known for its gourmet popcorn – and the chicken rice-flavoured popcorn (from $10 for three packets) is an intriguingly tasty option.





New snack on the block is Papapeng (left, $8, available at VivoCity Chinese New Year fair, or at *www.papapeng.sg*), which has launched its first Chip & Dip snack box.

It comes with lightly salted potato chips and a spicy hae bee hiam dip.

And if you must have a salted egg yolk snack, check out snack company Star Chew's Salted Egg Brainless Shrimp Cheek (above, $9).

It is called "brainless" because the roe is apparently removed.

PHOTOS: GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL, MDM LING BAKERY, SAHIBA CHAWDHARY, ONE FARRER HOTEL, COLD STONE CREAMERY, HOCK WONG, BAKERZIN SPRMRKT, PARADISE GROUP, TIONG BAHRU BAKERY, TEASPOON OF LOVE, PAPAPENG, OOH, THE NUTKINS

Dessert centrepiece

Food Critics' Pick

GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL'S DRUM OF FORTUNE



No festive dessert table is complete without an Instagram-worthy centrepiece.

Goodwood Park Hotel offers a showstopper that is almost too pretty to eat.

The Drum of Fortune (above, $108 nett, call 6730-1786 or e-mail deli@goodwoodparkhotel.com) is a chocolate marble cake coated in red and gold fondant, and topped with eight Mandarin oranges made with dark chocolate and mini chocolate ingots.

One Farrer Hotel's Orange Chocolate Chiffon Mousse Cake (right above, $38, call 6705-7825 or order at *www.orders.onefarrer.com*) has Mandarin orange chiffon layered with mousse and coated in an orange glaze.

It is decorated with koi chocolates, chocolate oranges and edible gold leaves.

To make the kids squeal with joy, SweetSpot at Marina Bay Sands has made a Piggy Bank ($78, call 6688-8588 or e-mail SweetSpot@MarinaBaySands.com) with Valrhona chocolate.

It sits on a treasure chest filled with dark, white and milk truffles.

The pig can be cracked open to unveil more chocolate ingots and coins.

Meanwhile, ice cream parlour Cold Stone Creamery also has a party pleaser for kids.

It has limited-edition Despicable Me ice cream cakes that feature the 12 zodiac animals (right, $65 or $90 in store or at *www.coldstonecreamery.com.sg*).





Mala and truffle

Food Critics' Pick

OOH MALA CRAB STICK



The top two trending flavours of the season – mala and truffle – are a must.

Spice up the New Year with mala chips ($15) from Antoinette patisserie at Penhas Road and Mandarin Gallery, flavoured with a mix of seven peppers including Sichuan lantern peppers and Sichuan bullet head peppers. Another alternative is The Pine Garden bakery's mala peanut ikan bilis cookies ($18.90, *www.pgcake.com*).

But if you want something that packs a punch, snack brand Ooh is it.

Besides its scrumptious mala potato and cassava chips, it has launched limited-edition crab stick ($18) and peanuts ($10, 06-K5 Plaza Singapura, or order at *www.ooh.sg*).

A good deal is its Chinese New Year set of crab stick, peanuts and two packets of chips for $38.

Can't take the heat? Two local brands offer truffle-flavoured treats. 25grams Bakery has rolled out truffle white chocolate macadamia cookies ($27, available at Takashimaya and VivoCity Chinese New Year fairs) – an interesting blend of flavours.

Another truffle and nut pairing is Careshop de Café's truffle pistachio cookies ($21.90, available at Takashimaya, VivoCity and Bugis Junction Chinese New Year fairs).

Do not miss the new macadamia Fortune sticks ($19.90) – coffee or yuzu – which are fancy versions of the Pocky stick snack.

Good for gifts

Food Critics' Pick

HOCK WONG



If you are looking for a corporate gift hamper, try Malaysian bak kwa brand Hock Wong, which makes its debut in Singapore for Chinese New Year.

Its gift boxes (above, from $148 for a set of five boxes, available at various Chinese New Year fairs or at *hockwong.com.sg*) are shaped like the auspicious gods of blessing, fortune, longevity, happiness and wealth.

Each piece of bak kwa (minced meat or bacon) is individually vacuum-sealed so that the meat remains tender and moist.

The limited-edition bacon bak kwa, in particular, is a sinful treat.

If bulk is your thing, go for Mdm Ling Bakery's limited-edition Chinese Zodiac Auspicious Cookies Collection (right, $128 a set, call 8787-4142, go to *www.mdmling bakery.com*).

There are 12 bottles of Chinese New Year goodies, each with a different snack, such as pineapple balls, kueh bangkit, and arrowhead crisps, and labelled with a different zodiac animal and a brief prediction of the year ahead.

And for your favourite foodie relative, grab a Sinpopo Brand hamper (from $138 at Sinpopo Grocer at Paragon; Sinpopo Brand Restaurant at 458 Joo Chiat Road).

It features its well-loved kueh lapis and gula melaka honeycomb cake, along with a selection of kaya and cookies.





For a dramatic finish, complete the dish at dinner by ladling the coriander-laden soup over the ribs, in front of your guests. ST PHOTOS: HEDY KHOO

Thai pork dish as festive treat

The citrusy, chilli-hot and fragrant centrepiece should wow everyone at your reunion dinner



Hedy Khoo
STFood Online Editor

Welcome the Year of the Pig with a show-stopping centrepiece of Leng Saap Moo, a delectable Thai dish of pork spine ribs.

This visually arresting platter of stacked ribs covered in a cascade of coriander soup will get your family in the mood for festive feasting.

It is a piquant addition to the usual festive fare and bound to be a talking point at your reunion dinner.

This is one mountain of pork ribs that is sheer pleasure to conquer. The citrusy tang of lime, the heat from chillies and the fragrance of coriander combine to keep the dish from tasting too porky.

Leng Saap Moo features pork spine, also known as pork loin back ribs. In Mandarin, these ribs are known as long gu, which translates to dragon ribs.

Order long gu at the butcher and you will get a "you know your stuff" look of respect from even the surliest butcher.

In Chinese cooking, long gu is traditionally used for cooking soups and cut into smaller pieces for ease of boiling.

So when ordering at the butcher, be sure to remind him not to chop up the ribs. I cannot emphasise this enough.

All three butchers I patronised insisted on chopping up the ribs. Only one of them – a youthful-looking butcher with blue-dyed hair – agreed to leave the ribs whole, upon my insistence.

He then guessed correctly that I was planning to cook Leng Saap Moo.

There are essentially only two major components to the dish. One is pork ribs and the second is a soup that uses copious amounts of coriander.

Before you start, be sure to blanch the ribs to avoid any unpleasant meaty odours. You also save yourself the hassle of having to skim scum off the stock later. The ribs are then cooked in a stock that is packed with natural sweetness and flavour from a medley of vegetables. I threw in chicken carcasses for extra flavour.

Save the coriander roots and use them in the stock as they lend aromatic flavour to the stock and ribs. (Check out last week's recipe for Khao Tom to get tips on cleaning coriander roots.)

If adding daikon, choose small-sized daikon radishes as these are sweeter than the large ones.

A secret that a Thai food fanatic shared with me is to add sugarcane to the stock.

Luckily for me, I have pots of purple sugarcane in my garden, but you should be able to get it from the vegetable stall at the wet market. Sugarcane adds incredible natural sweetness to the stock.

Save the stock to use for preparing the soup that is poured over the ribs in the final assembly.

With all that flavour packed into the stock, the resulting soup is incredibly tasty, livened up further by chillies, lime juice and fish sauce.

For a dramatic presentation, complete the dish at the dinner table by ladling the coriander-laden soup over the ribs, in front of your salivating guests.

As you pour, remember to cue them to start recording for their social media accounts.

Follow Straits Times Food on Instagram @straitstimesfood. If you do try out this recipe, take a photo and share it on Instagram. Use the hashtag #straitstimesfood, mention and tag @straitstimesfood in your post. Happy feasting!

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• Follow Hedy Khoo on Instagram @hedchefhedykhoo

LENG SAAP MOO (THAI PORK SPINE)



Ingredients

- 5.5kg of pork loin back ribs, pork loin ribs and soft bone ribs
- 18 litres of water
- 500g chicken carcasses
- 6 coriander roots
- 3 small daikon radishes (1kg), peeled and cut into 6-cm thick chunks
- 1 carrot (175g), peeled, quarter lengthwise
- 2 yellow onions (450g), peeled and halved
- 200g sugarcane, peeled and halved
- 120g green chilli padi
- 40g red chilli padi, sliced finely
- 60ml lime juice
- 70g Thai palm sugar
- 150ml fish sauce
- 250g Thai coriander (Sawtooth coriander)
- 150g coriander, chopped (reserve 20g to use as garnish)

You will need a 20-litre pot and a plate with a diameter of 18cm.

Method

1. Fill a pot with 8 litres of water and bring to a boil.
2. Place ribs in pot to blanch until there is no visible blood. Remove the ribs and rinse them.
3. Place chicken carcasses to blanch until there is no visible blood. Remove the carcasses and rinse them. Discard the water.
4. Fill a large (20-litre) pot with 10 litres of water and bring to a boil.
5. Place the coriander roots in the water.
6. Place the daikon, carrot, onion, sugarcane and chicken carcasses in the water.
7. Add the pork ribs. Cover and boil over high heat for 2 hours and 30 minutes.
8. Remove the pork ribs and arrange them on a large plate.
9. Strain the stock, pour 2.5 litres into a clean pot and bring to a boil.
10. Add the green and red chilli padi and bring to a boil.
11. Add the lime juice, Thai palm sugar, fish sauce and let the soup come to a simmering boil.
12. Stir well and turn off the heat.
13. Add the coriander, stir and pour the mixture over the pork ribs.
14. Garnish with the remaining 20g of coriander. Serve immediately.

SCAN TO WATCH

See how Hedy Khoo cooks Leng Saap Moo.

Swig

Wines to go with CNY dishes



Anjali Raguraman

With Chinese New Year around the corner, wine-making ambassadors from Australia's Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) – which has the likes of Penfolds, Beringer and Max's wine in its portfolio – recommends the best pairings for various Chinese New Year dishes.

"We had to be conscious of finding wines that could match the richness of the dishes, while not overpowering the complex and sometimes delicate flavours," says Mr Sam Stephens, 39, Penfolds Brand Ambassador (Asia, Middle East & Africa).

Wine pairings suggested include the experimental Penfolds Lot 518 – a Barossa Shiraz which is fortified with the addition of Chinese spirit baijiu – that pairs well with dishes such as fish maw soup.

There is also a sparkling wine from their Maison de Grand Esprit range, for dishes such as yam abacus seeds. "We definitely found that more intense grapes such as Chardonnay, Shiraz and Cabernet worked well," says Ms Kate Rowe, 34, TWE Brand Ambassador (South-east Asia, Middle East & Africa).

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Penfolds Special Bottlings Lot .518
Spirited wine with baijiu
($150, only at DFS Changi)
Paired with: Fish maw soup, ginseng chicken soup, roast duck, braised pork



PHOTOS: TREASURY WINE ESTATES

The rich umami flavours of fish maw soup initially stumped Ms Rowe, but she says the"518 was a real revelation".

"The Lot.518 has fruit sweetness from the Shiraz and savoury notes from the baijiu. This worked perfectly with the richness of the chicken and umami of the broth."

Lot.518 is also suited for dishes such as roast duck, braised pork and ginseng chicken soup.

She suggests chilling it to "between 13 and 16 deg C to give it a better mouthfeel" and decanting the wine 30 minutes prior to drinking "to unlock more aromas".

Maison de Grand Esprit
Cremant de Bourgogne
($45, only at DFS Changi)
Paired with: Yam abacus seeds, stewed Hokkien mee sua, black melon seeds



This sparkling wine is a blend of 60 per cent Chardonnay, 20 per cent Pinot Noir and 20 per cent Gamay, and has what is described as "zesty flavours with a clean, crisp creaminess and lingering finish".

Ms Rowe says: "The toasty brioche and apple flavours of this sparkling wine from Burgundy work beautifully with the sight sweetness and rich texture of yam abacus seeds."

For dishes like stewed Hokkien mee sua, the acidity and freshness of the wine cuts the rich fattiness of the noodles. It also enhances the nutty flavours of snacks like black melon seeds.

Penfolds Grandfather
Old Tawny Port
($98, only at DFS Changi)
Paired with: Love letters, pineapple tarts



This fortified wine is a blend of varieties including Mourvedre, Shiraz, Grenache and Cabernet, and is best served slightly chilled and in small servings. Mr Stephens says: "The rich raisin and caramel notes of the port bring out the sweetness and coconut notes of love letters, while the notes of dried fruit and prunes bring out the immense sweetness of pineapple tarts."

Beringer Founders Estate Chardonnay
(Recommended retail price of $38, available at Cold Storage, FairPrice, Giant, RedMart and Amazon)
Paired with: Sea cucumber with stuffed minced meat

While this Chardonnay pairs typically well with grilled chicken and seafood, Mr Stephens says: "The creamy oak of the Chardonnay balances the creamy texture of the sea cucumber and the thick gravy, while the savoury minced pork allows the ripe fruitiness of peach and apricot in the wine to shine through."

Penfolds Max's Shiraz Cabernet
(Recommended retail price of $42, from Cold Storage and selected Giant outlets)
Paired with: Roasted suckling pig, roast duck

The wine is made of a blend of 77 per cent Shiraz and 23 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, giving it rich fruitiness and strong tannins. Mr Stephens says: "The blackcurrant notes compliment the succulent pork flavour and the tannins of the wine help cut through the richness of the meat and crackling."

Top Five: Yusheng

Toss for luck

The Sunday Times picks five of the most interesting yusheng in Singapore for 2019



Wong Ah Yoke
Food Critic

Yusheng, or lohei, has become an integral part of Chinese New Year celebrations in Singapore. But it is actually a relatively new tradition that is practised primarily here and in Malaysia, and not by Chinese in other parts of the world.

The story told here is that in 1964, four Singapore chefs – Sin Leong, Hooi Kok Wai, Tham Yui Kai and Lau Yoke Pui, known collectively as the Four Heavenly Culinary Kings – came up with a colourful version of a raw fish dish that was usually eaten with congee and served it as a festive dish.

Shredded raw vegetables and red and green pickles were added, and a sweet plum sauce to signify a sweet life ahead. Everyone at the table tosses the salad, shouting out good wishes while the ingredients go flying.

In Malaysia, however, the story goes that a man from Seremban named Loke Cheng Fatt created the dish in the 1940s.

But whichever version is true, it is indisputable that nowhere has yusheng taken on so many forms and guises as in Singapore. Each year, restaurants here come up with innovative twists to the dish by coming up with new ingredients, new flavours and, in recent years, shaping the shredded vegetables to look like the Chinese zodiac animal of the new year.

It is not just Chinese restaurants that serve this dish during the festival. Non-Chinese restaurants such as Sabai Fine Thai By The Bay and Indian restaurant Song Of India have their versions too, as do Western restaurants such as Alma and Corner House.

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1 Long Beach Seafood Restaurants

30 Stevens Road 01-10, tel: 6445-8833
Open: 11am to 3pm, 5pm to midnight daily

Long Beach has five outlets in various parts of the island, and I tasted its yusheng earlier this month at the newest one in Stevens Road. It is also available at the Dempsey and Stadium Boulevard outlets.

Unlike at other places, this is a fruit and not a vegetable salad. The fruit depends on what the chefs decide are the best on the day, but you're likely to find dragonfruit, kiwifruit, mango and peach.

The raw seafood can vary too, with choices such as hamachi, turbot, geoduck and lobster. The standard abalone conch yusheng costs $228, but additional seafood will be charged according to market rates.

The fruit's acidity gives the dish an appetising tartness that is complemented well by the pineapple dressing for the salad. The dish is available for dine-in until Feb 19. Pre-orders are necessary.

PHOTOS: WONG AH YOKE, MANDARIN ORIENTAL SINGAPORE, SABAI FINE THAI BY THE BAY, CARLTON HOTEL, SI CHUAN DOU HUA



2 Cherry Garden

Mandarin Oriental Singapore
5 Raffles Avenue, tel: 6885-3500
Open: Noon to 2.30pm,
6.30 to 10.30pm daily

At first glance, the yusheng here does not look much different from other eateries'. A mound of julienned vegetables such as carrot and radish forms the centre, surrounded by plates of raw salmon.

But look more closely and you find that there are also thinly sliced cucumber, purple cabbage and pear. And on the salmon are bits of Alaskan crab meat and julienned rosella fruit. There's also an extra plate of deepfried fish skin.

But what I like most is the dressing – there is a spring onion sauce on top of the usual sweet one. They combine into a perfect balance of sweetness, umami and tartness.

I find the yusheng tastes better after it sits for a while as the ingredients marinate in the dressing and the flavours develop further. So have seconds. And thirds.

Available until Feb 19, prices are $138 for small and $276 for large.



3 Sabai Fine Thai By The Bay

01-02 Customs House
70 Collyer Quay, tel: 6535-3718
Open: 11.30am to 1.45pm,
6 to 9.15pm daily

If you like the spicy, sweet and sour combination that characterises much of Thai cooking, Sabai's yusheng is just the thing for you.

Most of the ingredients are those you find in the traditional version – raw salmon, shredded radish, carrot and assorted greens, pickles and crushed peanuts. There are pomelo sacs, too, to give the salad a fruity freshness.

The Thai flavour comes from the dressing – a mix of fish sauce, lime juice, chilli, garlic and sugar similar to what is used for Thai dishes such as steamed fish. To balance the tartness, there is also plum sauce.

I love the zing from the lime juice and the slow burn that comes from the chopped chillies.

Sabai's yusheng comes in two sizes, at $58.88 and $78.88. For takeaways, it provides complimentary delivery to nearby addresses such as Raffles Place. It is available until Feb 19.



4 Wah Lok Restaurant

Carlton Hotel Singapore
76 Bras Basah Road, tel: 6311-8188
Open: 11.30am to 2.30pm, 6.30 to 10.30pm daily (lunch starts at noon on Sundays and public holidays)

The yusheng here goes back to the dish's original roots by having a savoury soya sauce-based dressing instead of sweet plum sauce.

Called hamachi yusheng "Shunde" style, it is named after the district in China's Guangdong province where the dish came from. But instead of the freshwater fish used in the old days, sashimi-grade hamachi (amberjack) from Japan is used for better food safety.

The fish is sliced thickly, so it does not get overwhelmed by the salty sauce. A tinge of lemon juice also helps to balance the flavours.

The fish is tossed with ingredients such as shredded cucumber, ginger, spring onion and ground peanuts.

It is available until Feb 19 for dine-in only, at $108 for small and $188 for large.



5 Si Chuan Dou Hua

60-01 Top of UOB Plaza
80 Raffles Place, tel: 6535-6006
Open: 11.30am to 2.30pm,
6.30 to 10.30pm daily

If you want a break from the usual salmon and hamachi for your yusheng, try the fugu version here.

I love raw pufferfish for its texture. It is tougher than most other fish and so it is often sliced very thinly until translucent. Even then, it has a very firm bite, which I like.

Here, the slices are arranged artfully into a smiling pig face to go with the Year of the Pig. Also in homage to the zodiac animal, house-made bak kwa is added to the yusheng.

Tossed with a variety of fresh greens including rocket leaves and ice plant, as well as deep-fried silver bait, there is an abundance of flavours and textures.

It is available at $198 at the chain's Top of UOB Plaza outlet until Feb 19.

ST wine
our best picks

Wines to go with CNY dishes

Here are ST Wine's top 10 picks and the food to pair them with





Deep Wood Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside 2016
Country: Australia
Usual price: $75
ST Wine price: $66
Food pairing: Braised noodle, bak kwa and nian gao



Salvalai Monile Ripasso Corvina 2014
Country: Italy
Usual price: $70
ST Wine price: $55
Food pairing: Pan-fried beef, barbecued red meats and dumplings



Isabel Estate Pinot Noir 2016
Country: New Zealand
Usual price: $75
ST Wine price: $66
Food pairing: Roasted duck and fish dishes



Koyle Royal Syrah 2009
Country: Chile
Usual price: $60
ST Wine price: $52
Food pairing: Roasted and grilled meat, curry



Tenuta Di Corte Giacobbe Suove 2017
Country: Italy
Usual price: $45
ST Wine price: $38
Food pairing: Lobster, grilled fish, abalone, smoked salmon lo hei and other seafood



Chateau La Mauleone, Lalande De Pomerol 2013
Country: France
Usual price: $50
ST Wine price: $43
Rating: RP 92 points
Food pairing: Buddha jumps over the wall, pen cai, braised and other stewed dishes



Montes Limited Cabernet Sauvignon Carmenere 2016
Country: Chile
Usual price: $43
ST Wine price: $39
Rating: JS 91points
Food pairing: Roasted meats, preserved meats



Kalleske Clarry's Grenache-shiraz-mataro 2017
Country: Australia
Usual price: $55
ST Wine price: $49
Food pairing: Peking duck and roasted suckling pig



Kaiken Terroir Series Torrontes 2016
Country: Argentina
Usual price: $39
ST Wine price: $33
Food pairing: Teochew-Cantonese style steamed fish, steamboat and chicken dishes



Koyle Auma 2013
Country: Chile
Usual price: $180
ST Wine price: $168
Rating: RP 93 Points
Food pairing: Roasted meats, roasted pork, bak kwa, lasagna, cold cuts

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Singapore Cooks

No short cuts to baking cookies



Mrs Belinda Foo got her recipe for almond cookies from a late distant relative, who had exacting standards in baking.
ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

Belinda Foo kneads each batch of dough by hand and pays obsessive attention to detail when she makes almond cookies

Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

When it comes to baking almond cookies, Mrs Belinda Foo, 55, is nothing short of meticulous.

An exact 6g ball of dough is measured and rolled into a perfect sphere.

A drop of egg yellow food colouring is added to the egg wash to ensure a golden sheen.

After baking, the cookies would get her nod of approval only if they have the "correct cracks" along the surface.

That obsessive attention to detail comes from a late distant relative, whom she affectionately called Auntie Siew.

Mrs Foo, who does operational procurement at a German bank, fondly remembers her for holding the highest standards in baking almond cookies. That includes using only whole almonds from California.

"Once, I used a different kind of almond and she called to ask why I used the 'wrong almonds'. When she came to teach the recipe to me and my neighbours 10 years ago, she would pick out the balls of dough that were not round enough," says Mrs Foo, who gets her supply of almonds from Teck Sang, a wholesaler of nuts, herbs and dried seafood in Hongkong Street.

"She'd even point out who were 'not worthy' of making the almond cookies any more because they did not do it right."

When she was a teenager, these precious almond cookies were what Mrs Foo looked forward to during Chinese New Year, when Auntie Siew gave her family two Ovaltine containers filled with the bite-sized goodies.

She says: "The recipe has been with my aunt for at least 50 years and I believe it was also passed down to her. It is thanks to her that I have a good recipe and I bake the cookies to honour her."

Mrs Foo, who is married to a Boeing flight instructor with six children, follows the original recipe to a tee, but reduces the sugar level.

The blended almonds are meant to have a coarse texture to give more bite to the cookies, but can be blended till fine as well.

Vegetarians who want to try the recipe can omit the egg wash used, Mrs Foo suggests.

Every batch of dough is kneaded by hand and while an electric mixer can be used, Mrs Foo is not keen.

"It's called handmade for a reason. No shortcuts," she insists.

Indeed, there is no compromise when it comes to churning out Chinese New Year goodies by hand for friends and colleagues.

Besides almond cookies, Mrs Foo also gathers her 80-year-old mother, one of her sisters and two neighbours to make biscotti, pineapple tarts and pig- and dog-shaped butter cookies with a chocolate centre.

"That's the New Year spirit for me, when we get together to bake. Everyone has her role and we are chatting and having fun," says the second of eight children.

The family whips up a feast over the festive period too. Dishes include sio bak (roast pork belly), curry and braised mushroom dishes.

On the last day of Chinese New Year, they make choy geok – a traditional dish made with leftovers and boiled into a soup with chilli, tamarind, garlic and mustard leaf.

Mrs Foo's love of cooking stems from her mother, who used to make love letters for Chinese New Year over a charcoal fire. She also cooked dishes like pig stomach soup and made glutinous rice dumplings.

Mrs Foo says: "We were trained in making rice dumplings by first learning how to wrap sand. If we could do that, then we were allowed to wrap the actual dumplings."

While she is passionate about heritage recipes, she is also quite the experimental cook.

In 2016, she took a part-time diploma in Baking Arts & Science at the CerealTech School of Baking Technology, where she honed her craft in baking bread and making elaborate tiered cakes with intricate sugar work.

She says: "Baking and cooking is also about the learning process and why you do things a certain way. For example, you understand why the temperature of water is very important for making bread.

"Over the years, I have gotten to understand my kitchen equipment better, as well as how the same ingredient from different countries can affect the product."

Mrs Foo adds: "Most importantly, my mum always says you must be happy when you are cooking or baking. As long as you are happy, even the simplest dish will taste good."

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ALMOND COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

250g whole almonds (with skin on)
450g flour
200g icing sugar
½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
220ml canola oil
1 egg
1 drop of Egg Yellow food colouring
100g whole almonds (with skin on), sliced

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 180 deg C.
2. Line a baking pan with baking paper. Spread the almonds on the pan and roast in the oven for 10 minutes until fragrant. Check occasionally to ensure the almonds do not burn.
3. Remove the pan from the oven and pour the almonds into a blender. Blend till the almonds have a coarse texture. If you prefer a finer bread crumb texture, blend for a few more minutes.
4. Mix the flour, icing sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a bowl with a spoon. Sift the ingredients into a large bowl.
5. Add the canola oil in small amounts to the dry ingredients, so the dough does not get too wet. Use your hands to mix the ingredients to form a ball of dough. If the dough is too wet, add small amounts of flour.
6. With a kitchen scale, measure 6g of dough and roll it into a ball (below). Place the ball of dough on a baking pan lined with baking paper.



7. Repeat the process with the rest of the dough and place the balls evenly on the pan. You will need five lined baking pans. Alternatively, you can roll out the dough into 4mm-thick sheets and use a cookie cutter to cut out shapes.
8. Break the egg into a small bowl and beat in the food colouring. Brush the egg wash on top of each ball of dough. Garnish each ball with one sliced almond.
9. Bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown.
10. Leave the cookies to cool on a wire rack (below) and keep in an air-tight container for up to three months.



Makes 150 cookies

Open For Business



GASTON BURGUNDY BISTRO & WINE BAR

Gaston Burgundy Bistro & Wine Bar in the Keong Saik neighbourhood is deeply rooted in the Burgundian heritage and its menu is made up of classic homemade specialties to be shared in a communal dining style.

The 55-seater restaurant is helmed by general manager Geoffrey Daurelle, who hails from Burgundy, while head chef Julius Soo Thoo has worked in the kitchens of restaurants such as L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, Iggy's and The Chophouse.

Among the most famous creations from Burgundy in Gaston's menu is Boeuf Bourguignon ($32++), a rich beef stew slowly simmered with red wine sauce.

For something more delicate, the Truite a l'Aligote ($28++, above) showcases trout served with white wine reduction made of Aligote, an indigenous white grape from Burgundy.

For dessert, there is Eclair au Cassis ($14++), a twist on the classic French pastry, where light choux dough shells are filled with purple cassis filling instead of the typical chocolate or vanilla cream. Cassis berry is an iconic fruit of Burgundy.

Where: 25 Keong Saik Road
Open: Noon to midnight (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 5pm to midnight (Mondays)
Info: Call 6909-8120 or go to www.bistrogaston.sg or www.facebook.com/gastonsingapore



PARADISE DYNASTY

Paradise Dynasty launched its 196-seater flagship outlet at Wisma Atria earlier this month, marking a new chapter for the restaurant after eight years.

In conjunction with the opening, the Chinese restaurant chain has collaborated with Beauty In The Pot to create Beauty Collagen Xiao Long Bao (above), which is available only at the new outlet but is not for sale – diners will get a complimentary serving with every order of the Specialty Dynasty Xiao Long Bao until the end of the month.

The brand is best known for its "colourful xiao long bao", the eight-colour Specialty Dynasty Xiao Long Bao featuring original, ginseng, foie gras, black truffle, crab roe, cheese, garlic and Sichuan flavours.

New dishes include the yellow croaker fish done in two ways – Crispy Yellow Croaker Spring Roll ($9.20++, three pieces) and Steamed Yellow Croaker with Fermented Rice and Chinese Wine ($32.80++).

Where: 01-18 Wisma Atria, 435 Orchard Road
Open: 11am to 10pm (Mondays to Fridays), 10.30am to 10pm (weekends and public holidays)
Info: Call 6219-3931 or go to www.paradisegp.com



PHOTOS: GASTON BURGUNDY BISTRO & WINE BAR, MINISTRY OF FOOD, PARADISE DYNASTY

• Opening a restaurant? Send the details to stlife@sph.com.sg

TERMINAL M

At this multi-concept gourmet space in Changi Airport Terminal 3, diners can find offerings from the various Ministry of Food (MOF) brands – Yu Long Quan (Chinese), Hanssik (Korean), Cafe Papa (Korean), Ten-ya (Japanese) and Kaisen-ya (Japanese).

Try the Korean and Japanese lunch sets such as Dosirak (Shake Shake Rice) from Hanssik and Anaga Tendon from Ten-ya, while Kaisen-ya's store-exclusive special dragon roll is suitable as a snack.

The highlight would be the Singapore-style chicken yong tau fu with secret MOF sauce and chicken xiao long bao in six Singaporean flavours (above). Terminal M's xiao long bao features flavours such as salted egg yolk, chilli crab, black pepper crab, bak kut teh, laksa and the original at Yu Long Quan.

All the dishes have no pork or lard and prices start from $3.50 with no service charge.

Where: B2-32 Changi Airport Terminal 3, 65 Airport Boulevard
Open: 11am to 10pm (Sundays to Thursdays and public holidays), 11am to 10.30pm (Fridays, Saturdays and eve of public holidays)
Info: Call 6382-3550, e-mail terminalm@ministryoffood.com.sg or go to ministryoffood.com.sg or www.facebook.com/TerminalMbymof







Left: Boston Lobster Fragrant Rice In Seafood Broth.

Above, from left: Pan-fried Jumbo Chilli Crab Bun, Chilli Crab Meat Sauce With Sliced Fried Mantou and Baked Jumbo Chilli Crab Puff.

Right: Cod Fish Otah In Coconut.
PHOTOS: JUMBO SEAFOOD, WONG AH YOKE

Restaurant Review

Chilli crab creations

Jumbo Seafood restaurant's new Ion outlet offers the favourite dish in dim sum form



Wong Ah Yoke
Food Critic

Jumbo Seafood is known for its chilli crab, but that is actually not my favourite dish from this popular local chain of seafood restaurants. I find the sauce too sweet and ketchupy, probably because I do not have a sweet tooth.

But I do like the chilli crab dim sum items specially created for its latest outlet at Ion Orchard.

The restaurant, which opened almost two months ago on the fourth floor of the swanky mall, marks the chain's first foray into Orchard Road. It is also the only outlet to offer dim sum.

There are three types of chilli crab items – Baked Jumbo Chilli Crab Puffs ($8.80 for three), Pan-fried Jumbo Chilli Crab Buns ($8.80 for three) and Chilli Crab Meat Sauce With Sliced Fried Mantou ($16.80).

The last item is the closest to eating actual chilli crab, except that you don't get a whole crab, only crab meat without the shell. But the sauce is different. It is a lot spicier and less sweet, which gets it my vote. Eaten with the accompanying deep-fried mantou (wheat bun), it is also a lot less messy to enjoy.

My favourite, however, is the baked puff, which is like char siew so, but with the char siew filling swopped with chilli crab sauce. The pastry is light and buttery and goes perfectly with the spicy filling.

The pan-fried buns, which are derived from Shanghai buns, are less successful because the dough is too thick and overwhelms the filling.

There is one other dim sum item I heartily recommend. Rice Rolls With Prawns And Laksa Sauce ($6.80) reminds me of curry chee cheong fun in Kuala Lumpur, with the rice rolls drenched in a mildly spicy gravy. I have always found flat rice noodles to be perfect for laksa and am glad to find this dish here.

You should also try the Crispy Fried Cigar Spring Rolls Stuffed With Prawns ($6.80), which are very crispy and packed with sweet and springy prawn paste.

The more common dim sum items I tried, such as Siew Mai ($6.80 for three) and Har Kau ($6.80 for three), are run-of-the-mill though.

The new outlet also features dishes that are exclusive to it. They include Cod Fish Otah In Coconut ($16.80), with the otah steamed in a whole coconut and gratinated so the top layer is a bit burnt. It tastes good, but the texture is a tad dense. Perhaps the spicy fish mousse should be whipped further to introduce more air for a lighter mouthfeel.

Another new dish, Boston Lobster Fragrant Rice In Seafood Broth ($78), is good as it is. It's what the Chinese called pao fan, a dish where puffed rice is added to hot broth at the table to create a sizzling effect. The broth is delicious and the rice stays a little crisp even while it soaks up the flavours.

A cheaper option is King Prawns And Fragrant Rice In Rich Seafood Broth ($38), which is similar but with prawns instead of lobster. That gives the broth a different flavour, which is good too.

Unlike the other Jumbo outlets which are popular with big groups, you find smaller tables – for two to six persons – to accommodate the executive crowd and smaller families who are more likely to form the clientele here. There are private rooms for bigger groups.

Another attraction for the Ion outlet is the view. The main dining room is small, but it looks out on the Orchard Road and Scotts Road junction. In the day, you get daylight streaming in and at night, the twinkling lights outside create a pretty effect.

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• Follow Wong Ah Yoke on Instagram @wongahyoke

• The Sunday Times paid for its meals at the eateries reviewed here.



JUMBO SEAFOOD
04-09/10 Ion Orchard,
2 Orchard Turn, tel: 6737-3435
Open: 11.30am to 3.30pm,
6 to 10.30pm daily

Food: ★★★★☆
Service: ★★★★☆
Ambience: ★★★★☆
Price: Budget from $70 a person, more for live seafood

Cheap & Good

Sides steal the show



Anjali Raguraman

At first glance, the protein bowls from a tiny hawker stall named Beng Who Cooks in Hong Lim Complex Market & Food Centre are not the prettiest to look at.

But unlike some Instagram-friendly bowls that look pretty but lack flavour, these make for a satisfying and pretty healthy meal.

This will appeal to those looking to eat clean before the indulgent feasting of Chinese New Year.

You customise your bowl at this stall by filling out a form – pick your carbohydrates, proteins, sides, add-ons and a sauce.

Bowls start at $6 for the smaller "hawker" bowl (one protein and two sides) and $9 for the "towkay" bowl (two proteins and four sides).

Options for the base are standard – white rice, fusilli pasta or romaine lettuce. The protein choices are chicken, spicy beef, dory fish and pan-fried tofu. I find the chicken and beef slightly under-seasoned.

The sides are the real stars. I enjoy the crispy, slightly charred broccolini tossed in sea salt and the crunchy, garlic chives. The lightly fried cherry tomatoes are sweet and succulent, while the onsen egg is perfectly cooked.

For added texture, options include corn flakes, garlicky bread crumbs, deep-fried tofu skin and tea jelly, which are more likely found in bubble tea.

The sauces – mild "lemonion" lemon and onion, sour "Golden Complex" or spicy "5-Foot Fury" – come in a separate container.

My bowl was just fine without the addition of any sauces, though the kicap manis-like 5-Foot Fury sauce packs a punch. Additional servings cost between 50 cents and $2.

It is amazing to see that co-owner and chef Jason Chua, the charming "beng" who cooks, manages to make all of this with a minimalist kitchen set-up in a tiny space.

He might even slip you an extra side if you ask nicely.

anjalir@sph.com.sg



A protein bowl with spiced beef, cherry tomatoes, garlic chives and broccolini.
ST PHOTO: ANJALI RAGURAMAN

BENG WHO COOKS
01-44, Hong Lim Complex Market & Food Centre;
open: 10am to 5.30pm (weekdays), closed on weekends; go to facebook.com/BengWhoCooks, instagram.com/bengwhocooks

Rating: ★★★½☆

WELCOME
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Cause for celebration

Meredith Woo checks out festive dishes and takeaways at two Chinese restaurants



Above: Prosperity Salmon Yusheng. Right: The Roasted Irish "Silver Hill" Duck. PHOTOS: TED CHEN

From now till Feb 19, 2019, Citi Cardmembers can receive 15 per cent off Chinese New Year Festive Takeaway items at Famous Treasure (13 Stamford Rd, #02-28 Capitol Piazza, Singapore 178905). Tel: 6881-6668. Terms and conditions apply.

Famous Treasure, Capitol Piazza

If you are craving raw fish instead of the smoked variety with your takeaway yusheng, Famous Treasure at Capitol Piazza is one place where you can get your fix.

Its Prosperity Salmon Yusheng comes in two sizes (medium: $68+, large: $98+). The pristine Norwegian salmon slices are complemented by shredded vegetables and crisp crackers for a satisfying crunch. Seasoned jellyfish strips and juicy pomelo sacs also add texture to the lohei platter.

Restaurant partner Jeff Foo takes pride in Famous Treasure's food quality and freshness, making sure that each dish is prepared a la minute.

Even the restaurant's table pickles — cherry tomatoes marinated with preserved plum, and green papaya slices — and sambal belacan, are made in-house.

Steeped in tradition, the Prosperity Fortune Treasure Pot (medium: $388+, large: $588+; order one day in advance) is cooked in a thick sauce that draws its richness from the chef's 11-year-old master stock.

The Roasted Irish "Silver Hill" Duck ($108+ for a whole duck), which requires a day's advance order as it must be marinated and air-dried overnight, is a must-try for its juicy meat and crispy skin. The bird, known for its fatty but delicate texture, is then spit-roasted for 15 to 20 minutes just before collection.

Famous Treasure can easily sell up to 200 such ducks a month, says Mr Foo.

These dishes and more are available on the seafood restaurant's festive takeaway menu.

Soup Restaurant

Dishes featuring a whole fish are a common sight on dining tables during Chinese New Year as fish (yu) symbolises abundance. But the fish bones and the "muddy" smell of freshwater fish may deter some diners.

Soup Restaurant solves this predicament with its popular steamed patin fish, nicknamed the Uncle Lapan Fish for its "whiskers".

The meat is smooth and delicate, leaving a clean flavour in the mouth. So confident is the homegrown dining establishment of the freshness of its ingredients that it serves the freshwater fish steamed, seasoned with only Samsui Ginger Sauce.

Managing director Wong Wei Teck says the fish is rich in Omega-3 and it feeds on fruits grown by the riverbed. It also has fewer, yet bigger bones that are easier to pick out. The fish has been on Soup Restaurant's menu since 2002.

Another gem is a new pen cai offering — Wellness Abalone Treasure Pot. Quality ingredients such as abalone, conpoy, fish maw and sea cucumber aside, the dish's braising sauce really stands out. It tastes lightly herbal, perfumed with Chinese herbs such as dang gui, dang shen and red dates.

I was also impressed by the Traditional Steamed Rice with Mushroom and Chinese Sausage, which is given extra oomph at Soup Restaurant as the rice is mixed with xue cai (a type of pickled vegetable).

These dishes are part of Soup Restaurant's dine-in set menus, priced from $98++ for two people.



Feast on Soup Restaurant's various festive dine-in menus. PHOTO: SOUP RESTAURANT

From now till Feb 19, 2019, Citi Cardmembers can receive 5 per cent off Chinese New Year Dine-in Set Menu and $10 off Chinese New Year Takeaway Set for 5 Pax at Soup Restaurant outlets islandwide. Visit www.souprestaurant.com.sg for list of outlets. Terms and conditions apply.

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